ROBERT FRIPP

FROM CRIMSON KING TO CRAFTY MASTER

by Eric Tamm

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Acknowledgments

For their help in the formulation of my thoughts relating to this book, I would like to thank Chris Roberts, Steve Roullier, Deborah Dill, Diana Dill, Meggan Moorehead, Kristina Holland, Ellen Paisley, Philip Brett, and Anthony Newcomb.

Professor Dean Suzuki, in addition to offering cheerful encouragement on an almost daily basis as I was writing, provided invaluable research materials from his personal collection, and the interlibrary loan staffs at the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University were of great assistance. Without the help of Betsy Uhrig, my tireless and tactful editor at Faber and Faber, bringing this book to completion would have been a much more onerous task, and I am thankful for her professional skills and personal support.

Among the Crafty Guitarists who were kind enough to share their reflections and insights with me, I am especially grateful to Tim Bauman, Ray Jung, Woody Hamilton, Steve Patterson, James Mott, John Relph, Bob Gerber, Tony Geballe, Chris Page, and Dick Bannister.

For his guidance in clarifying ways to develop relationships with my guitar, my music, and my self, I owe to Robert Fripp a debt of gratitude that quite possibly can never be repaid.

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Preface

This book is not a biography of Robert Fripp. I know next to nothing about the man's personal life, and even if I did would not be particularly inclined to write about it. This is a book about music and ideas. It is a book about how a certain definition of music and a certain approach to the making of music have in recent years crystallized around the public figure of a certain individual guitarist.

To put this in a different way, this is book more about art than about the artist. The late Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, criticized the modern sensibility: "Our conception of art as essentially the expression of a personality, our whole view of genius, our impertinent curiosities about the artist's private life, all these things are the products of a perverted individualism and prevent our understanding of the nature of ... art." As for "genius," a term which, as we shall see, Fripp has idiosyncratically incorporated into his own systematic writings on the act of music, Coomaraswamy wrote: "No man, considered as So-and-so, can *be* a genius: but all men *have* a genius, to be served or disobeyed at their own peril." *(Coomaraswamy, 38-9)*

In the current artistic climate we are obsessed with the artist's personality. The artist, let alone the pop star, is not an ordinary human being or humble craftsman, but a living myth. We have an insatiable appetite for the dirt dished out on our gods and heroes by the media. Supermarket tabloids are only the most colorful and obvious examples of a point of view that reaches even into academic musicology, as enterprising scholars publish posthumous psychoanalyses of famous composers. What sort of affair did Andrew Wyeth really have with Helga? What is Elizabeth Taylor's latest diet? Where does Madonna get her hair waxed, and exactly what parts of her body does she submit to the treatment? The reader should not expect to find out in these pages whether Robert Fripp gets his hair waxed, and from exactly what parts of his body. Such few indiscretions as may exist herein come from previously published interviews with Fripp himself, who tends to use them as comic relief from his otherwise rather serious (if not solemn) agenda.

I must ultimately beg the question of how much, or in what ways, our appreciation of music is governed by the "facts of life" surrounding its creation, creators, and sensitive participants. Coomaraswamy represents an austere, lofty view, but even he did not believe art could be understood in a vacuum – that is, in ignorance of the circumstances and culture that surrounded the making of works of art; on the contrary, he took it as his mission to educate the museum-going public to the point where they could have some inkling of the cosmic, archetypal forces which motivated medieval and Oriental artisans to produce the artifacts they did.

In this book I attempt to construct a conceptual and historical context for the understanding of Robert Fripp's music. There is no way this book, in and of itself, will enable the reader to understand *the music itself*. To understand the music you have to hear it (preferably live), experience it firsthand; you have to learn how to listen to it, and this can take time – a lot of time. Perhaps my words can take the reader to the brink of musical understanding but no further: they can't make you take the actual leap, as you poise yourself over the Kierkegaardian abyss. You have to jump yourself.

While less than eager to discuss his private life publicly, over the years Fripp himself has made known his thoughts on music and other topics in a variety of written media; I have drawn on these sources extensively in my research. In addition to the many interviews that have

appeared in the rock press, he has supplied informative if elusive liner notes for a number of his records (notably *The Young Person's Guide to King Crimson, God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners, Frippertronics/Let the Power Fall*, and *The League of Crafty Guitarists Live!*). In the early 1980s Fripp worked as a contributing editor for "Musician, Player and Listener" magazine, writing an extended series of essays on music, the music industry, and aspects of his own work. In more recent years he has begun to publish a series of "Guitar Craft Monographs" which relate to his current teaching practices, this material is echoed in his current column in "Guitar Player."

What I offer in this book is an (I think) objective summary and exposition of Fripp's major ideas as culled from the above sources; a critical and occasionally analytical account of his recorded music (conditioned, certainly, by the totality of my own musical experience and education, as well as by my individual taste); a representative sampling of the published commentary on Fripp by other critics; a personal account of my experience as one of Fripp's Guitar Craft students; and an evaluation of the meaning of the body of his work from such perspective as I have on music history as an historian and on music as a musician.

I first heard Robert Fripp's music in 1969, when I was fourteen and attending boarding school at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. As I recall, I bought King Crimson's first record, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, because of its cover: anything with a sleeve that bizarre, I figured, had to be heavy. And, strangely enough, it was: even through my tiny, tinny plastic/leatherette monaural record player, "21st Century Schizoid Man" screamed like a banshee, "Epitaph" echoed like a funeral dirge to a whole technological way of life. Parts of "Moonchild" on Side B I could have done without, and in fact I usually only played the album's A side, but in this music I felt I had made a deep discovery – a discovery poignantly heightened by the fact that none of my friends seemed to grasp what the big deal about King Crimson was. I taught myself "Epitaph" by ear, and remember playing and singing it solemnly and mournfully at the piano in my parents' house in Rhode Island.

Somehow (those were scattered days) I missed out completely on Crimson's second album, *In the Wake of Poseidon*. I ordered their third, *Lizard*, through a record club, and even though by now I had an actual stereo system, the music sounded strangely disjointed to me, like an odd attempt at a fusion of styles that I could not quite make to gel in my mind. I was irritated by most of it, enthralled by brief moments. At the age of sixteen, my musical horizons were broad enough, ranging from be-bop to Beatles and from Beethoven symphonies to *Switched-on Bach*, but of *Lizard* I could make neither head nor tail, though I uneasily suspected the fault was at least partially my own.

I then forgot about King Crimson for several years. The next time the band's unusual appellation came up in my life was around 1978, when my best friend in college, Chris Roberts, a bass player and composer, turned out to have a passion for Fripp and Crimson. To my astonishment, Chris could play with facility all kinds of torturously difficult Crimson guitar and bass licks, and to my chagrin, he was always trying to get me to listen to the trilogy the group put out before disbanding in 1974: *Larks' Tongues in Aspic*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *Red*. Although at the time I was enthusiastically jamming and occasionally playing gigs with a coterie of Los Angeles new wave musicians, my interests were basically elsewhere: in the twentieth-century classical tradition of Mahler, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartok, which I was studying in school as part of my training to be a composer, naively – I saw little connection between such pursuits and Fripp.

By 1985 I had worked my way into candidacy for the Ph.D. in musicology at the University of California, Berkeley, and it gradually began to dawn on me that I had to write this monster thing called a doctoral dissertation, and that I had to come up with something to write about. Traditional subjects such as the history of the sixteenth-century motet or analysis of Beethoven's sketchbooks failed to galvanize my attention. I loved the classical tradition but still had a visceral passion for rock and roll. Casting about for topics, I zeroed in on the "progressive rock" of the 1970s, a music in which the head of classical sophistication was grafted Frankenstein-like onto the erotic body of rock. My nervous advisers said the topic of progressive rock as a whole was too broad and that I should pick a single group. From my vantage point at that instant in time, it seemed that King Crimson was an ideal choice: there had always been something challengingly different about their style – a rough-hewn, almost nasty quality that belied the obvious intelligence and musical awareness with which the music was put together and dispatched.

So I set about researching Fripp and Crimson, getting all the albums, finding and reading all the reviews and interviews, immersing myself in the music. It became clear that although it would not be precisely true to say that Fripp "was" King Crimson or that King Crimson "was" Fripp, he was nevertheless the sole common denominator throughout the band's many incarnations, and had been involved in a variety of projects having nothing to do with King Crimson per se. Fripp himself – not King Crimson – became the focal point of my research.

The more I studied, the more information I amassed, the more ideal my choice of topic seemed to be. Here was a guy – Robert Fripp – who was not only undeniably a guitar virtuoso and a creator of new, hybrid, innovative musical languages, but who had incisive, brilliant things to say about the music-making process, who cut through all the absurd hype of the music industry and set forth his own defiant yet coherent program for bringing sanity and art – existentially, not historically defined – into the rock marketplace.

I wrote up a fifty-four page "Dissertation Prospectus" for my U.C. Berkeley committee; they gave me a tentative go-ahead. I had learned that Fripp was currently conducting a series of residential guitar seminars in West Virginia under the evocative but enigmatic title "Guitar Craft." On October 20, 1985, I wrote him a formal letter to tell him about my dissertation project, and to ask whether I could interview him at some point. On November 1, he called me at seven in the morning (California time) to inform me that he had deep reservations about my project: for instance, he wished to distance himself as far as possible from the movement known as "progressive rock." He said, "If you want to know what I do, come to a Guitar Craft seminar."

So I did. I attended Guitar Craft XII at Claymont Court near Charles Town, West Virginia, between February 17 and February 22, 1986. My experience at the seminar is documented more fully in Chapter 10 of this book. In brief, it was the most stimulating week of my musical life, and Fripp turned out to be the most effective teacher with whom I have ever had the privilege of studying music. Fripp and his team presented ideas – not just vague theoretical concepts, but physical, practical, concrete principles and exercises – that four years later are still presenting challenges and inspiration to me in my own musical practice. Guitar Craft – which, prior to experiencing the discipline for myself had meant little to me other than an interesting concept glimpsed through a couple of scattered references – seemed to be an obvious and logical yet simultaneously unexpected and wondrous development in the saga of Robert Fripp. In spite of the riches he had contributed to the development of the practice of music and to musical vocabulary before 1985, his previous work seemed to pale in comparison with what the man was now putting forward – not merely a distinctive rock guitar style or an abstract philosophy of dealing with the music industry, but a whole approach to music's very essence, a style of life.

Fripp, however, never warmed to the idea of my writing about him or his work. In several conversations during the course of the Guitar Craft seminar he gently but firmly endeavored to dissuade me from carrying out my project. Reading over today the prospectus I showed him then, I am struck by how dry and analytically vacuous parts of it sound; I was, after all, trying hard to make the whole thing acceptable to my advisors at Berkeley – bastion of traditional musicology – and probably went somewhat overboard in the direction of formality and irrelevant minutiae. My impression at the time was that Fripp based his disinclination to being written about by a budding musicologist on a number of factors, including: a general mistrust of the written word (which is related to his mistrust of music notation); his strong feeling that what he has to offer is best presented in person, and perhaps can only be presented in person; the fact that I had not been there with him throughout his career; and the fact that writers in the popular music press have often said small, totally uncomprehending things about him and his music. Fripp seemed to want total control over what he and Guitar Craft were putting out to the world – a control which extended to a measure of actual secrecy concerning specific guitar exercises and such things as his "new standard tuning" (which he has since publicly revealed). *(Drozdowski 1989, 34)* I also got the feeling, which may or may not have been a product of my imagination, that Fripp was deliberately setting a stumbling block in my path, the way a Zen master might ask a student to perform some incomprehensible action with a hidden lesson.

Fripp must have intuited a strong sense of my dilemma, for in one conversation he suggested to me an alternative course of action: that I research and write about Brian Eno instead. At the Guitar Craft seminar itself, I vacillated and told Fripp I would write him a letter. Back in Berkeley, after a week or two of deliberation, I gave up on the idea of writing about Fripp, wrote to him of my decision, and set about tackling Eno. (The results of that study may be seen in my book *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound.*) On seeing the state I was in because Fripp had refused to "cooperate," my primary dissertation adviser, Professor Philip Brett, said, "Well, Eric, that's one of the advantages of doing *historical* musicology; it's much easier to wait until they're dead."

But I never forgot about Fripp. He called me graciously a month or two later to ask how I was doing on my Eno research; synchronistically, the moment the phone rang I was engaged in an analysis of one of his recorded collaborations with Eno, *No Pussyfooting*. We exchanged a few letters. I got my doctorate in May, 1987 and carried on, teaching music at Bay Area universities. My half-done Fripp research sat idle around the house in neatly organized filing cabinet drawers and three-by-five index card boxes. The idea of writing a book about his work gnawed at me. In spite of his hesitancy, I felt that what Fripp represented – a certain way of approaching music, a way that through my experience teaching and studying in music departments of established universities I have seen to be neglected if not completely undreamed-of – was important and vital enough to addressed in the form of a book. On attending a performance by the League of Crafty Guitarists in San Francisco in January 1989, my vacillation was transformed into determination: here was music that really kicked ass, in such a polite way! It demanded to be chronicled. A little voice spake into mine ear, saying, "Go ahead, *write* the dang thing! If you don't do this, someone else will sooner or later, and chances are it'll be someone less sensitive to the subject, less versed in the critical issues involved."

Hence the book that you hold in your hands now. Since in the end I wrote this as a book (not as a dissertation), I have been able to make it a more personal statement, unconstrained by the demands of academic musicological style. Furthermore, I ultimately concluded that if Fripp approved of the book beforehand, it probably wouldn't be worth writing. There is always something suspicious about an "authorized" biography (even though this is not a biography).

Fripp's own words and thoughts are available to all who would seek them out – in the existing interviews, liner notes, articles, and Guitar Craft monographs. Perhaps he feels it would have been unseemly for him to collaborate actively on an outsider's book about his work.

As will become clear in the following pages, there are areas of music on which Fripp and I cannot see eye-to-eye – for instance, the real meaning of the Western classical written music tradition. Like any two contemporary musicians, we each have different spheres of musical experience: when any two musicians meet, there will be areas of recognizance, affirmation, and agreement, just as surely as there will be areas of xenophobia, negative judgement, and disagreement.

I am all too aware of the element of subjectivity. Perhaps the reader may take this as a forewarning: ultimately – as if it needed to be stressed – I speak not for Robert Fripp but for myself.

Note

In critiquing the music of Fripp's albums (both King Crimson and non- King Crimson) I have adopted a variety of formats. I treat some albums on a song-by-song basis. Others I discuss in more general terms, with special attention to chosen pieces deemed particularly representative. Still others, such as the 1980s King Crimson trilogy *Discipline/Beat/Three of a Perfect Pair*, seemed to call for an approach acknowledging their essential stylistic unity. It is my hope that the reader will not be distracted by this pluralism of critical methods, but rather will be able to accept what is offered herein as the residue of one writer's prolonged struggle to come to terms with a plurality of musical styles – and as an indication of his considered disinclination to artificially systematize a personal encounter with a body of work – Fripp's – so remarkable for its very variety.

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Chapter One: The Man, the Musician

Who knows where the time goes?

– Sandy Denny

Robert Fripp the Person(s)

Robert Fripp (b. May 1946, Dorset, England) – band leader, recording artist, rock star, virtuoso electric and acoustic guitarist, producer, writer, composer, and, currently, music educator – has been a fixture on the contemporary music scene since 1969. On July 5 of that year, Fripp's first commercially successful group, King Crimson, catapulted themselves to the forefront of public awareness by playing in front of 650,000 people at the Rolling Stones' free Hyde Park concert.

For all his public exposure in the twenty-one years since then, Fripp has remained something of an enigma. Since the drift of what he does tends to be determined by experiences of inner upheaval, it has always been impossible to predict his next move, though in retrospect the logic of the development may seem clear enough. With almost every new venture he has startled his audience and opened up new doors of perception and music.

The music press has had a great time with Fripp. He has been called "the world's most rational rock star," "the Mr. Spock of rock," "the owlish one," a "persnickety plectrist" and a "plectral purist." He has been characterized as a "nouveau conceptualist," a "tin woodsman with a microtonal heart," and as "a riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a guitarist."

One writer described him as having "the air of an old-fashioned, straight-laced and hidebound European professor." That's not the way he came across to me at Guitar Craft XII; well, there was an "element" of the learned professor, perhaps – even of the streetwise priest – but more striking was how genuinely funny he could be, able to make great fun of himself. Fripp possesses a bitingly pointed sense of irony. The liner notes to *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners*, for instance, are hysterical if you read them in the right spirit; if you read them somberly or defensively, they sound like the most god-awful pomp. (Years ago I noticed a similar phenomenon when reading the manifestoes of the nineteenth-century Danish Christian existentialist Søren Kierkegaard.) Fripp isn't above ordinary, earthy bathroom humor, either. *Rolling Stone* writer Fred Schruers describes an encounter with Fripp and his tour party in the men's room at Boston's WBCN: "What does one do? Walk over to meet this ferocious intellectual composer guitarist as he lines up at the urinal? As I lurk uncomfortably, the investigator of archetypes addresses his companions: 'I don't see how you can piss without waggin' your willies afterward.'"

Fripp is robust, poised, and physically nimble; he moves gracefully. A peculiar thing about the man is that he must be one of the world's most unphotogenic people. Having seen dozens of photographs of him from every stage in his career, I can attest to the fact that almost none of them look anything like he does in person. Fripp's face, which in pictures can look muggish, leering, or frozen (sorry, Robert!), is in reality a constant dance of expression, handsome and fascinating (that's better). Although he is moderately small in stature, Fripp's presence has a way of filling up the room. He is indeed one of the most *present* people I have ever met: present to those he is with, acutely sensitive to the situation of the moment, capable of exceptionally keen concentration.

Fripp does have something of a reputation in the press for keeping his emotions carefully under wraps, for being cool and considered, for being something of a mechanical marvel. An interviewer from *Creem* relates: “He asks me how many words I will need for my article, mentally calculates how much talking he will have to do to provide them, and stops at that point.” For his part, Fripp laments: “One of the disadvantages of having the particular stereotype I do is that I tend to get serious interviewers. When I have a serious interviewer coming in my heart sinks. But what can you do? Either refuse to answer his questions, or speak to the serious young intellectuals in the vocabulary serious young intellectuals understand.”

Jungian theory postulates four basic psychological functions – thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition – any of which may dominate the others in a given individual personality. Fripp rejects the notion that he is primarily a rational thinking type: “I’m instinctive [intuitive, in Jungian terms] by nature ... I analyze and rationalize *after* the event in order to persuade people of something I think to be right.” Nevertheless he presents the image of a man to whom self-control is a cardinal virtue, who is aware of his lower nature but struggles to keep it in check. Fripp will instantly retract a remark that in the next moment he considers “flippant” or “inconsidered.”

Fripp’s studied objectivity about himself has disconcerted some and charmed others. He indulges in the habit, frequently to comical effect, of referring to himself in the third person, as “This Fripp ...” But indeed this detachment from the multiplicity of inner selves gives rise to the question: where, or who, is the real Robert Fripp? He is a self-conscious role player, moving in and out of entirely convincing personas seemingly at will. In Guitar Craft seminars he adopts the role of the Teacher and sits as it were enthroned smack at the middle of the head dining table, surrounded by a Da Vincian phalanx of subordinate teachers; but the moment the seminar is officially declared over, he deserts his central position and carries his breakfast tray to a side table, mingling among his students. When a student now asks a question he deems inappropriately deferential, Fripp brushes it off with an exasperated twinkle in his eye, saying, “Do you want me to go back and sit over there?” motioning with his hand to the head table.

David Bowie once remarked that being a person is like maintaining a car: you can alter parts of your personality just like you might decide one day to change the oil or install a new carburetor. Laurie Anderson has said, “I operate my body the way most people drive their cars.” While Fripp refrains from the automotive analogy, he has expressed a similar idea: “One has to see that one’s personality is not what one is. It’s an organ through which I experience life. So, how can one come to see that? Years of observation, years of discipline ... Not long after I was born – I think I was between about three and six months old – I had a clear moment of, I suppose you’d say, waking up in my body. Here was a little Fripp baby in a pram, and I saw quite clearly that this was the animal that I inhabited ... Then, in March 1976, when I was in retreat in England, as I was wheeling a wheelbarrow of compost in the garden, in a flash I saw quite clearly that Robert Fripp did not exist ... Robert Fripp consists of a collection of impressions and experiences over a period of years that seem to have some coherence, but the level of coherence is very, very fragile.”

If one thing is clear, it is that Fripp is a person of concentrated self-discipline. He likes to keep regular habits and daily routines, beginning each day with a relaxation exercise before breakfast. (Although he has not divulged much publicly in terms of other specific personal exercises or disciplines, the general nature of his work in this realm will be considered more fully in Chapter 7 and 10. Certainly guitar practice itself has been a major discipline for Fripp. In 1979 he described himself as having “a very modest lifestyle, one that some people would call ‘mean.’

I don't have a string of fast cars or fast women, and I don't take any drugs at all, not even aspirin." He does, however, go for a good strong cup of coffee, or a beer or two at the local pub.

Fripp is known as an avid reader with an extensive personal library containing volumes on religion and philosophy, politics, psychological theory, and economics. In the articles he wrote for *Musician, Player, and Listener* magazine in the early 1980s, he quoted freely from Plato, Shakespeare, Jacques Ellul, E.F. Schumacher, T.S. Elliot, Stafford Beer, Proudhon, and other writers. As the "world's most rational rock star" has said, "Me and a book is a party. Me and a book and a cup of coffee is an orgy." *(Freff 1984, 106)*

Fripp the Professional Musician: Career Overview

In the chapters to follow we shall come back and look at the music of each phase of Fripp's career in greater detail; for now let us trace the development in broadest outline.

Chart 1: A Concise Fripp Chronology

to 1969:	Early practice, Giles, Giles & Fripp
1969:	King Crimson I
1970-2:	King Crimson II
1973-4:	King Crimson III
1974-7:	Retreat
1978-81:	The Drive to 1981: Frippertronics, League of Gentlemen
1981-4:	The Incline to 1984: King Crimson IV, Andy Summers
1985-90:	Retreat, Guitar Craft, League of Crafty Guitarists, Sunday All Over the World

(The designations "King Crimson I, II, III, IV" are my own, they represent clear stages in the evolution of the band, and correspond not only to significant personnel changes but to notable shifts in the band's musical style and the impact it had on the public. Fripp has been the only member of King Crimson to participate in all of the group's configurations.)

The original King Crimson comprised Fripp (guitar), Ian McDonald (reeds, woodwind, vibes, keyboards, mellotron, vocals), Greg Lake (bass guitar, lead vocals), Michael Giles (drums, percussion, vocals), and Peter Sinfield (lyrics). This band began rehearsing on January 13, 1969, and made their debut at the London Speakeasy on April 9.

King Crimson was "a way of doing things." In all its manifestations, King Crimson represented, at least in Fripp's eyes, a certain approach to music-making and a certain approach to the relationship between the performers and the audience. The exact nature of these approaches was never defined explicitly, at least not for public consumption: King Crimson was, for Fripp, a powerfully motivating if deliberately nebulous concept. The following extract is taken from a "Rolling Stone" interview conducted in 1973 by Cameron Crowe:

Crowe: You often say that you feel King Crimson is a way of doing things.

Fripp: I gave that to you as your key. That's your key to the core of the band. King Crimson, you see, is a magical act.

Crowe: In what way?

Fripp: Every act or thought is a magical act.

Crowe: You seem to tell many interviewers that King Crimson is a way of doing things ... what?

Fripp: Being.

Crowe: Then why don't you simply say that King Crimson is a way of being?

Fripp: It's that as well. I'm not interested in being pegged down with narrow definitions ... As soon as one defines, one limits. I don't want to define what King Crimson is. I'd rather let *you* do the thinking.

King Crimson I released their first album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, on October 10, 1969. Each song on the record was different from the others: some had the melancholy "classical" sound of the Moody Blues and Procol Harum, others featured glittering, painstaking arrangements reminiscent of the Beatles, still others offered the raw rock and roll energy of the Rolling Stones, but jazzified, kicked into overdrive. Some writers in the rock press proposed King Crimson as heir to the throne of the Beatles, who were at the time in the process of abdicating.

King Crimson I, however, fell apart immediately following a U.S. tour in the late fall of 1969. 1970-1972 represents what Fripp has called an "interim" period for the group; King Crimson II, as I shall call it, was a sort of concept band with an almost revolving-door policy in terms of the musicians who comprised the group at any given moment. Among King Crimson II's participants new were Mel Collins, Gordon Haskell, Boz Burrell, Andy McCulloch, and Ian Wallace; Greg Lake and Michael Giles contributed to studio sessions.

Four albums were released during this period: *In the Wake of Poseidon, Lizard, Islands, and the live Earthbound*. It was a time of enthusiastic if sometimes injudicious musical experimentation, with often dubious results. Some of King Crimson II's songs were hard rock, some were jazz-tinged, several were classicized, overly precious ballads. The music was astringently dissonant one moment and vacuously airy the next. Many of the rhythms were either skittish and jumpy or obvious and foursquare. The attempt at a grand fusion of styles was difficult to bring off; Sinfield's lyrics, originally so evocative and in tune with the late-1960s *Zeitgeist*, seemed increasingly improbable and contrived. Critics in the press began to be put off and confused, and Fripp himself was later to voice grave doubts about the validity of his music of this period.

King Crimson II broke up definitively in April 1972, following the *Earthbound* U.S. tour; it had been a long time coming. In July, Fripp was introduced to a new interactive tape technology by his friend Brian Eno: whatever the human performer played – typically one or two notes on electric guitar – would be heard again, at a slightly lower volume level, several seconds later. Several seconds after this, the sound would be heard again, slightly softer; in the meantime, the performer could add more notes, which then began their cycles of gradual repetition and decay. In September Fripp and Eno recorded "The Heavenly Music Corporation" in Eno's home studio, a piece that was to become Side One of their first collaborative album, "No Pussyfooting." The simplicity and novelty of the signal loop and layer technique must have been refreshing to the Crimsoned-out Fripp, who was later to refine the technique and call it, for his own performance and recording purposes, "Frippertronics."

Also in July 1972, Fripp assembled the all-new lineup that would constitute, more or less, King Crimson III: David Cross (violin, viola, mellotron), John Wetton (bass and vocals), Bill Bruford (drums), and Jamie Muir (percussion). Taken as a trilogy, the three King Crimson III

albums (*Larks' Tongues in Aspic*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *Red*, released between 1973 and 1974), present a more muscular sound than most earlier Crimson efforts; by the time "Red" was recorded, the group had been pared down to the basic power trio of Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford.

Wetton was capable of playing bass lines that fused harmonic backing with gritty melodic interest; Bruford's drumming was more rock-oriented than previous Crimson drummers, with less emphasis on trebly cymbal and snare drum colors, yet with a unique straightforward attack; Fripp's guitar work had developed a new emphasis on big power chords, without sacrificing its original melodic intensity; violinist Cross proved more than equal to the task of blending into the Crimsoid alchemy, contributing many sensitive melodies and counterpoints; and it is to Muir's percussion that *Larks' Tongues* owes many of its most exquisitely surreal passages. The King Crimson of 1973-4 played, in effect, artistic heavy metal, in what was one of the most convincing syntheses of hard rock, instrumental virtuosity, and compositional artifice to come out of the period.

A live album, *USA*, was released in April 1975; it was more consistent and well recorded than the previous live album, *Earthbound*.

By July 1974, an accumulation of doubts and powerful personal experiences had led Fripp to a position where he felt compelled to disband King Crimson III unilaterally: "I felt I had to stop performing in the rock circus because the reciprocal relationship between audience and performer dropped markedly, to a point were it was just antithetical to what I wanted to do ... Everything deteriorated through 1970 and 1971, and it was very much a struggle to try to find the spirit that had interested me in 1969. The tremendous burst of energy that kicked off King Crimson became steadily refined and sophisticated, to the point that for me, absolutely nothing was happening. When Crimson finished in 1974, it was the last possible moment for anything to have stopped."

Between September 1974 and August 1977, Fripp retreated from the music industry for three years, a period he has described as having three phases: preparation (winding up his affairs), withdrawal (attending a ten-month course at J.G. Bennett's Academy for the Harmonious Development of Man at Sherborne), and recovery (slowly readapting to reality, and easing his way back into the musical scene).

Fripp's first step out of self-imposed retirement was occasioned by an invitation from Peter Gabriel in September 1976 to work on the latter's first solo album in Toronto. In June, Fripp began working intensively with the tape-loop system Eno had shown him five years before. During this period he worked with David Bowie and Brian Eno on *Heroes* in Berlin, produced Daryl Hall's solo album *Sacred Songs,* and played and recorded with the novelty/new wave band Blondie and the quirky acoustic feminist trio of sisters, the Roches. As early as November 1977 Fripp was at work on his own first solo album, *Exposure*, which was not to be finished and released until 1979. *Exposure* was an oddly masterful piece of vinyl, as clearly influenced by the New York new wave aesthetic as it was to have a marked influence on that same genre. *Exposure* represents a diverse stylistic spread, from punk to electric urban blues, from gentle emotional ballad to apocalyptic epic, from *musique concrete* to Frippertronics: all in all, a conceptual collage representing the artist's diverse interests at the time, which seemed uncannily congruent with the interests of the contemporary musical public.

On September 11, 1978, Fripp launched what he called "The Drive to 1981," whose philosophy involved a sound rejection of ingrained music industry values of seeking greater and greater profit through the mindless and greedy promotion a few selected, almost prefabricated groups based on the lowest common denominator theory of public taste and sensibility. Fripp

railed against what he called the music industry's "dinosaurs" – cold-blooded, reptilian corporate entities of immense size and dangerously little intelligence. As an alternative way of presenting music to the public, he proposed the "small, mobile intelligent unit" – a phrase which became the Frippism *par excellence* of the late 1970s. In order to demonstrate his concept of the small, mobile, intelligent unit in action, Fripp undertook a solo world Frippertronics tour (April-August 1979); he released records of Frippertronics and Discotronics (*God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners* [1980], featuring vocals by David Byrne of Talking Heads, and *Let the Power Fall* [1981]); and he formed the League of Gentlemen, a sort of new wave dance band that toured England and America from April to November 1980 and released one album.

In the spring of 1981, Fripp began practicing with one of the recently available Roland guitar synthesizers, and began rehearsing a new group, originally called Discipline, with bassist/stick player Tony Levin, guitarist/vocalist Adrian Belew, and drummer Bill Bruford. This was to become King Crimson IV. In a number of statements to the press, Fripp attempted to explain that the new band had not consciously decided to use the King Crimson name for commercial purposes, but that at a certain point it simply became evident that they "were" King Crimson. King Crimson had always been a way of doing things, and indeed with the new band the historical King Crimson pattern played itself out once more: a short period of intense collective creativity resulting in a dynamic, new musical style, followed by a decline into somewhat mannered refinements and repetitions of the original insights and a fragmentation of group identity due to the individual creative leanings of the musicians.

King Crimson IV toured and released three albums between 1981 and 1984: *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three of a Perfect Pair*. The style typically involved complex meters, polymeter, short note values, precisely controlled instrumental textures, ambiguous tonality, and driving percussion. The incredible complexity of the rhythms obtained from the interaction of high-speed guitar and stick ostinatos was offset by Belew's quirky vocals and Bruford's admirably precise and restrained drumming. The music of King Crimson IV was an intelligent and impeccably crafted synthesis of several of the musical trends animating the early 1980s: new wave, synthesizer rock, and minimalism.

Apart from Fripp's work with King Crimson, his most significant collaborations to come out of the 1981-1984 period were two albums with Police guitarist Andy Summers, *I Advance Masked* (1982), and *Bewitched* (1984). The first album was a virtual catalog of techniques and tone color possibilities available to the guitarist of the early 1980s. The pieces, all instrumental, ranged from structured improvisation over a disco-like beat to soft-edged fantasy soundscapes. Best were those passages in which Summers' and Fripp's guitars discernibly talked to each other; the music then took on the character of abstract conversation, of a communion of spirits. Side One of *Bewitched* consists of three long dance-oriented tracks – perhaps "dance-oriented art music" in the manner of Bach's keyboard, violin, cello, and orchestral suites. Side Two contained seven electronically-based soundscapes more or less in the vein of *I Advance Masked*, but with somewhat more distinctively shaped formal, harmonic, and textural outlines.

Other session guitar work Fripp has done over the years includes work on Brian Eno's solo albums *Here Come the Warm Jets*, *Another Green World*, *Before and After Science*, and *Music for Films*; with David Bowie on *Scary Monsters*; with David Sylvian on *Alchemy – An Index of Possibilities*; and with the Flying Lizards on *Fourth Wall*.

In the liner notes to the 1985 album The League of Gentlemen/God Save the King (a record containing revised versions of previous releases from the Drive to 1981 period), Fripp summed up the position at which he had arrived: "The period 1977 to 1984 was one of intense activity for me, following a three year retreat from the music industry. This intentional work in

the market place was presented as the Drive to 1981 and the Incline to 1984." (The Incline to 1984 was never so formally defined as the Drive to 1981; my understanding is that it was a sort of self-parodying running joke in the manner of the late Beatles, "And here's another clue for you all / the walrus was Paul."). Fripp continued: "When the seven year commitment completed once again I went into retreat, to allow the future to present itself. Currently I am conducting a series of residential guitar seminars in West Virginia for players of all levels of experience."

This rather innocuous-sounding announcement portended the launching of an entirely new type of enterprise, one for which Fripp had been preparing himself for at least a decade. Guitar Craft is not simply the title of a school of music or a particular method of learning to apply oneself to the technique of playing the acoustic guitar; it is not in itself a performance ensemble, a musical style, or a repertoire; it is neither merely a set of finger exercises nor a set of relaxation exercises. Guitar Craft is all of these things, but perhaps most significantly, it is a virtual style of life – one embraced by Fripp himself, and by a number of the more than six hundred students who have attended courses since in the United States, England, Germany, and other countries around the world.

My own stimulating encounter with Guitar Craft will be discussed in Chapter 10. For now, suffice it so say that Guitar Craft represents, or represented for me, a systematic debunking of many popular myths surrounding the creative process, and the replacement of such myths with a novel and eminently practical approach to music in general and to the guitar specifically. The Level One student (there are seven Levels in Guitar Craft – everyone, regardless of expertise, starts at the bottom, is invited to disorient himself at the outset by tuning his guitar in a new way; he is then enjoined to sit in a particular way, become aware of his body in a particular way, hold the pick in a particular way, utilize the left hand on the fretboard in a particular way, and memorize a set of exercises by rote. The pedagogical technique of Guitar Craft involves daily group and individual guitar lessons, morning relaxation sessions, classes in the Alexander technique, classes in rhythm, instruction in concentration and attention, communal meals, and as much practice during "free time" as one can possibly fit into a nineteen-hour day.

King Crimson was a way of doing things that seemed to work for short periods of time and then fall apart. With Guitar Craft as a style of life, Fripp seems to be succeeding in training young musicians to exercise a certain quality of attention in the practice and execution of music: in the pedestrian sense, he is training professional performers. The next step – and it is a tall order, an enterprise of a qualitatively different nature – would involve training the audience. One of Guitar Craft's current projects is the establishment of a more or less fixed performance ensemble. To this point, the League of Crafty Guitarists has been an ad hoc affair – any number of Fripp's students (including myself) have performed together in public in different circumstances. One early configuration of the League – which Fripp visualizes metaphorically or metaphysically as one guitarist in many bodies – recorded an album, *The League of Crafty Guitarists – Live!* in December 1985. The album gives some sense of the style and atmosphere of the ever-growing Guitar Craft repertoire, but ultimately, and probably inevitably, fails to capture the spirit of the music itself, which, it can be convincingly argued, can only be experienced live by an attentive audience.

Over the last year or two, Fripp has performed with Sunday All Over the World, a band consisting of Fripp, his wife rock chanteuse Toyah Wilcox, Crafty Guitarist Trey Gunn, and drummer Paul Beavis. Since the group has neither, as of this writing, appeared in the United States, released any recordings, nor generated a great deal of press, I have little information to go on. In 1989 Gunn reportedly said that Sunday All Over the World was the result of Fripp's "trying to find the right way to work with Toyah ... So far it's all built around the vocals, but

everyone’s contributing pretty much equally. We’re not looking to be a heavy soloing band, but it’s sure there when we need it.” *(Drozdowski 1989)*

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Chapter Two: The Guitarist and the Practice of Music

Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does, the better.

– Andre Gide

Fripp The Guitarist

Robert Fripp said in 1986, "Music so wishes to be heard that it sometimes calls on unlikely characters to give it voice." Fripp was – and is – the opposite of a musician like Mozart, whose seemingly divine, God-given talent enabled him, under his father's tutelage, to be playing the harpsichord with facility by the age of five and composing sonatas and symphonies by the age of eight. Of his own natural aptitude, or rather lack thereof, Fripp has often said, "At fifteen, I was tone deaf with no sense of rhythm, sweating away with a guitar." *(Fricke 1979, 26)* He contrasts his situation with that of the supreme guitar hero of his generation: "One might have a very direct, very innate and natural sense of what music is, like Hendrix, or be like me, a guitar player who began music tone deaf and with no sense of rhythm, completely out of touch with it. For Hendrix the problem was how to refine his particular capacity for expressing what he knew. For me it's how to get in touch with something that I know is there but also I'm out of touch with." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)*

Little is known publicly about music in the Fripp household and extended family, though he has spoken admiringly of a certain great aunt, Violet Griffiths, a piano and music teacher: "As a young girl she practiced nine hours a day, five on scales alone." Mrs. Griffiths has been highly successful in inspiring her students; she "regularly has the highest examination results for her pupils." She attributed her success to "pushing": "Aim for 100%, not 50%," *(Fripp 1981B, 44)* Fripp quotes her as saying. A similar work ethic permeates Fripp's own approach to the guitar: what he has been able to accomplish, he feels, has nothing to do with talent, but has been the result of sheer effort. He has practiced guitar with varying degrees of intensity over the years, the most being "twelve hours a day for three days running," and sometimes six to eight hours a day over fairly long stretches. Such a level of commitment has been necessary to attain the goal: "It's a question of developing technical facility so that at any moment one can do what one wishes ... Guitar playing, in one sense, can be a way of uniting the body with the personality, with the soul and the spirit." *(Rosen 1974, 37-8)*

Fripp took up guitar at the age of eleven, playing with difficulty on an acoustic Manguin Frere. Fripp is naturally left-handed, but for some reason decided to go at the guitar in the normal right-handed position, with the left hand doing the fretting and the right hand doing the picking – unlike other famous southpaws like Jimi Hendrix and Paul McCartney, who turned their guitars upside down so they could play them "normally."

After struggling on his own for some three months, Fripp took lessons for about a year at the School of Music in Corse Mellon, a village a couple of miles from Wimborne, his home town. His instructor was Kathleen Gartell, a piano teacher who was not a guitarist but who did give him some useful music theory background. The man Fripp has singled out as his most important guitar teacher was Don Strike, whom he called, "a very good player in the Thirties style." Fripp's lessons with Strike lasted about two years, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. Strike laid the foundation for what was to become one of Fripp's specialties, a rapid cross-picking technique. A few years later, when Fripp was eighteen, he ran into Strike again; the older guitarist, on hearing Fripp play, shook his hand and acknowledged him the better player. Today Fripp recalls this acknowledgement as an important milestone in his life.

During his teenage years Fripp also experimented briefly with flamenco guitar styles and took lessons from Tony Alton, a Bournemouth guitarist. All such experiences were doubtless helpful in channeling the young Fripp's musical urges, but he did not feel entirely comfortable with any particular guitar style or discipline: in 1974 he said, "I don't ... feel myself to be a jazz guitarist, a classical guitarist, or a rock guitarist. I don't feel capable of playing in any of these idioms, which is why I felt it necessary to create, if you like, my own idiom." necessary to create, if you like, my own idiom." *(Rosen 1974, 18)*

Fripp's first electric guitar, purchased when he was about fourteen, was a Hofner President, which he played through a six-watt amplifier with an eight-inch speaker. He has also used Fender Stratocasters, a J-45 acoustic, a Yamaha acoustic, a Milner pre-war acoustic, and a Gibson tenor guitar. The main instrument with which he was associated in the 1970s was the Gibson Les Paul, a guitar he found ideal for his characteristic single-string work. In the 1980s he used Roland synthesizer guitars (notably with King Crimson IV and in his collaborations with Andy Summers). Recently, with Guitar Craft, he has championed the Ovation Legend 1867 super-shallow-bodied acoustic. (Technically inclined readers who are interested in more details on Robert Fripp's equipment – amplifiers, picks, strings, devices, and so on – are urged to consult Rosen 1974, 32; Mulhern 1986, 90; Drozdowski 1989, 32; and the liner notes to several of the albums.)

Almost from the very beginning of his guitar playing, Fripp realized that "the plectrum guitar [guitar played with a pick] is a hybrid system" for which no one had ever developed an adequate pedagogical method. Left-hand position and fretting technique, at least for the nylon-stringed guitar, had been established to a high degree of sophistication by classical guitarists, but right-hand position and plectrum technique had no comparable tradition. The use of a pick is derived from the playing of banjos and subsequently guitars in the jazz of the 1920s and 1930s, but every player essentially developed his or her own method; and since in the jazz context "the main function of the right hand was to enable the guitar to be heard above ten other pieces in a dance band," the results generally lacked for subtlety. "So there I was at twelve in 1958 and it was so obvious that there was no codified approach for the right hand for the plectrum method. So I had to begin to figure it out ... It was very difficult because the only authority I could ever offer was my own." Beginning then, Fripp devoted nearly thirty years to the development of the picking method he now teaches to his Guitar Craft students. Part of the development took place on a conscious level, but much of it was a sort of unconscious accretion of physical knowledge gained through constant practicing. Fripp says that when he came to consolidate the approach for Guitar Craft, "There was a knowing in the hand through doing it for years which I consulted. It's interesting. My body knew what was involved, but I didn't know about it." *(All quotations in this paragraph from Drozdowski 1989, 30).*

Fripp's view is that educating oneself musically is a never-ending process. From a technical point of view, his approach seems to involve systematically attacking theoretical entities like scales through the physical and mental discipline of learning to play them fluently. In rock music, he points out, only three or four scales are in common use – Major, Minor, Pentatonic (Blues), and slight variants of these. But in fact, any number of other scale formations are available to the creative musician, ranging from the old Church Modes through the so-called synthetic scales (which have exotic names like Super Locrian, Oriental, Double Harmonic, Hungarian Minor, Overtone, Enigmatic, Eight-Tone Spanish, and so on, and on into symmetrical scales (what twentieth-century French composer and teacher Olivier Messiaen called the "Modes of Limited Transposition") such as Whole Tone, Chromatic, and Octatonic/Diminished.

All of these can be learnt in various transpositions, that is, starting the scale on a different note (C Major, C# Major, D Major ... B Major). In addition, most of these scales can be used as the source of other formations by changing the tonic note while retaining the pitch-set itself. Such was the basis of Western European medieval and Renaissance modal theory – a theory in which one basic scale (the diatonic scale, corresponding to the white notes of the keyboard) ultimately served as the basis of seven different modes, each of which was felt to have its own unique psychological and symbolic character:

Chart 2: The Church Modes	
Ionian Mode (Major)	C D E F G A B
Dorian Mode	D E F G A B C
Phyrgian Mode	E F G A B C D
Lydian Mode	F G A B C D E
Mixolydian Mode	G A B C D E F
Aeolian Mode (Minor)	A B C D E F G
Locrian Mode	B C D E F G A

Today's enterprising musician may likewise construct "modes" based on some exotic (non-diatonic) scale, yielding still more inflections or tonal dialects, still more musical variety. For instance, the modes based on the Hungarian Minor scale would begin like this:

Chart 3: Modes of the Hungarian Minor Scale	
Hungarian Minor	C D Eb F# G Ab B
2nd mode	D Eb F# G Ab B C
3rd mode	Eb F# G Ab B C D
4th mode	F# G Ab ... (etc.)
(etc.)	

A further avenue of scalar exploration, which, so far as I know, Fripp has never mentioned in print nor worked with himself, is the raga system of India, with its rigorously logical array of seventy-two parent scales. The point of all this is that each individual scale carries with it certain musical characteristics, certain expressive possibilities, certain objective sound-qualities available to all who master them. Western classical music got along quite nicely for some two hundred years (let's say 1650-1850, using essentially only two scale forms, major and minor; much twentieth-century art music has concentrated on a single form, the chromatic or twelve-tone scale. Fripp has been eager to move into new territory: specific sources of unusual scales he has cited as having been useful to him include Bartok string quartets, Vincent Persichetti's staid but readable textbook compendium of contemporary musical language, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, the eccentric yet influential *Joseph Schillinger System of Musical Composition*, and jazz-rock groups of the 1970s such as the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report. *(Fripp 1982A, 102)* Fripp sums up: "The possibilities for extending [musical, scale] vocabulary are ... quite immense. Since it takes three or four years to be able to work within any one scale fluently and utterly, there's more than enough work for a lifetime." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)*

Paradoxes of Process and Performance

From the foregoing discussion, the reader might get the impression that the technical side of music is all-consuming for Fripp. To the contrary, it is eminently clear that he views the discipline of guitar technique, scales, and so on, not as an end in itself but merely as a means to an end. The end, to put it simply, is to make contact with music. And to make contact with music involves work on the whole personality, a process which has social, cultural, and political ramifications; art and life cannot be separated. Although Fripp's most developed ideas on the subject of making contact with music have been expressed in terms of his Guitar Craft teaching, and are best discussed in that context, here I might attempt a brief summary of the concept of "music" that has motivated Fripp since before the earliest days of King Crimson.

In talking, thinking, writing, and reading about music as an ultimate quality – for "Music," as Fripp has written, "is a quality organized in sound" *(GC Monograph One [A], VI: see note in hard copy for actual genesis of this quotation)* – it must of course always be borne in mind that we are attempting to deal with the ineffable through the medium of language, with all its limitations. Prose has its own laws and grammars, having evolved, one might say, not in order to describe or explain the ineffable, but rather to convey information of a more mundane nature. Music, conversely, has evolved as a subtle language of the emotions – or, if you prefer (and Fripp probably would), a language of the spirit. Poetry recited aloud, with its quasi-musical cadences, meter, rhythm, pitch, and vocal tone colors, is somewhere in between. The point is that words can never convey the meaning of music; often enough, verbal formulations of the ineffable bog down in paradox, antinomy, self-contradiction. This will happen in this book, and it has happened to Fripp from time to time.

In 1973 Fripp said, "I'm not really interested in music. Music is just a means of creating a magical state." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* What he meant (I think) by this was that the outer forms of music, its styles, history, structure, even aesthetics – the stuff of the academic approach to music – were not the point for him. The point was the "magical state" that the practice of music could put one in. Seen from this vantage point, the actual notes and rhythms, the timbral surface, the sounds in themselves, hardly make any difference; it is the attitude and receptivity of the participants that matter. The focus is not on the object, but on the subject – not the sound, but the listener.

Not the knowledge, but the knowing. Paradoxically, of course, it is precisely the sounds you hear, whether you are the musician or the audience, that will enable you to draw your attention to the quality of the knowing: the sounds become the knowledge, but it is the knowing rather than the knowledge that is vital.

In 1974, Fripp told an interviewer: "When I was twenty-one I realized that I'd never really listened to music or been interested in it particularly. I began to take an interest in it, as opposed to being a guitar player who worked in certain situations. I've gotten to the point now where I see music as being something other than what most people see. I would say that the crux of my life is the creation of harmony, and music you take to be one of the components of that harmony." *(Rosen 1974, 38)*

This statement seems related to the earlier one, but here the word "music" is used in a different sense. Here "music" signifies that intuitively grasped quality, organized in sound, which constitutes the "knowing" of the true musical experience. What Fripp is saying here (I think) is that he had been a guitarist for about ten years before realizing that there was a sense behind the sounds he had been producing. Previously, he had worked on music purely as a craft, as a

physical skill on a mechanical level, like a typist whose fingers fly about the keyboard without any recognition of the meaning or import of what's being typed, or like a conservatory music student who practices for hours a day, never paying attention with his ears to the *music* there. And, in a sense, music *isn't* there if no one is listening to it as such; there may be organized sound, but not a *quality* organized *in* sound. In this quotation, Fripp uses the visual analogy: "I see music as being something other than what most people see." Not the seen, but the seeing.

Particularly during the Frippertronics tour, Fripp would invite his audiences to become part of the creative process by engaging in active listening. When the audience expects the performer to do everything for them, the result is passive entertainment, diversion, escapism. When the audience participates sensitively in the creation of the music – for the real music is not "out there" somewhere, existing as an object, but "in here," in the quality of attention brought to the mere sounds – then the result is art. At a Boston concert, Fripp told the audience, "You have every bit of the responsibility that I have. Because life is ironical, I get paid for it and you don't." *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

The central paradox, or quandary, of Fripp's entire career has revolved around the difference between, on the one hand, making art-objects for a product-hungry yet passive audience, and, on the other hand, actually *making art with* an audience on the basis of a vision of a shared creative goal. Like making love, to make art you need equal partners; otherwise one or the other of the partners becomes a mere art, or sex -object for the other. Fripp may have had such thoughts on his mind when, in 1982, he remarked bittersweetly that in swinging London in 1969, "I began to see how much hookers, strippers and musicians have in common: they sell something very close to themselves to the public." *(Fripp 1982A, 42)* Once one has tasted real love (or real art), mere sex (or mere entertainment) may satisfy on a certain primitive level, but a deeper longing remains frustrated.

Fripp saw King Crimson as a way of doing things, and though he never defined very precisely what he meant, I imagine one thing he had in mind was this idea of making music with fellow musicians on the basis of a shared intuitive experience of music as a quality organized in sound – and then taking that experience to the public in hopes of expanding the circle of sharing in the creation of art. King Crimson, Fripp always stressed, was primarily a live band, not a recording unit. Ultimately, Fripp has concluded that recordings cannot convey a quality experience of music, and for this reason has very mixed feelings about his entire recorded output. An interviewer asked him recently, "Do you still think of making records as a bother and a burden?" Fripp answered: "Sure ... Because it has very little to do with music. See, the end to music is a process. The end to recording is also a process. But a record is a product. Because of the restrictions and constrictions, the way of recording ... it's very difficult for that process to be reflected in the product." *(Drozdowski 1989, 37)*

Nearly a decade earlier, Fripp had expressed the same frustration, in the context of producing an album for the Roches. "Translating from performance to record," he wrote, is something like trying to put "Goethe into English or Shakespeare into German" and trying to express "the implicit rather than the literal sense." *(Fripp 1980A, 26)*

Using a variety of images and metaphors, some of them religious, many musicians, irrespective of genre, have said that the key to creativity lies, in effect, in getting the ego out of the way and allowing a greater force to play through them. Felix Cavaliere: "We are like beacons from another source ... I feel some of us as human beings are tuners to this vibration that comes through us." Lamont Dozier: "I can't take credit for this stuff. I'm only human and these things are the makings of God. Everything I do that's good, at least, is a reflection of His hand." Judy Collins: "Everybody's a channeler. Every artist who walked down the street and whistled a tune

is a channeler. We don't do it. It comes through us. It's not ours." Raffi: "I find the process of where these songs come from mysterious, because ... I feel that, sure, I can take credit for these songs, but they come from another place." *(Song Talk 1989)*

Robert Fripp's formulation of the principle goes like this: "The creative musician ... is ... the radio receiver, not the broadcasting station. His personal discipline is to improve the quality of the components, the transistors, the speakers, the alloys in the receiver itself, but never to concern himself overmuch with putting out the program. The program is there; all he has to do is receive it as far as possible." *(Garbarini 1979, 31-2)*

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Chapter Three: Fripp the Listener

When I was fourteen years old there was rock'n'roll – Fats Domino and Bill Haley – but frankly I thought it was stupid. I didn't like rock'n'roll. I was a snob and I still am. I think rock n roll is interesting and some of it is more interesting than it used to be in the fifties. Yet basically it's not something that means very much to me. If the whole history of rock'n'roll disappeared tomorrow morning, I wouldn't care. I'm delighted that I've influenced rock'n'roll musicians. I'm pleased that David Bowie has said nice things about me and so has Brian Eno. Outside of [their] being complimentary, the only thing I admire about rock'n'roll [musicians] is how much money they make.

– Steve Reich (Vorda 1989, 16)

One of the ideas that was important to me was that you could be a rock musician without censoring your intelligence. Rock music has a very anti-intellectual stance, and I didn't see why I should act dumb in order to be a rock musician. Rock is the most malleable musical form we have. Within the rock framework you can play jazz, classical, trance music, Urubu drumming. Anything you like can come under the banner of rock. It's a remarkable musical form ...

– Robert Fripp (Grabel 1982, 22)

The Agony of Rock

The war of words over rock goes on – telling us, if nothing else, that music is still alive, and that people (some people, anyway) care deeply enough about it to take a stand one way or the other.

Critics have often contended that Robert Fripp's guitar concepts of the late 1970s and 1980s – you can hear them in Frippertronics as well as the League of Gentlemen, King Crimson IV, and Guitar Craft – owe a debt to the minimalist tradition of Steve Reich, Philip Glass, La Monte Young, and Terry Riley – a tradition that began in the 1960s as a rebellion against the academic serial music of the 1940s and 1950s. From its beginnings, minimalism seemed to have something in common with rock: a steady pulse, plenty of repetition, a grounding in simple tonality. Furthermore, the audiences for both types of music overlapped to a considerable extent. Albums like Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1969) were packaged psychedelically and marketed to the rock public; many of Philip Glass's early performances took place not in classical concert halls but in downtown New York rock clubs.

The 1970s saw a parting of the ways, however. The music of the best minimalist composers grew more complex, more difficult – in a sense, more classical and less minimal. With a few notable exceptions, such as Brian Eno, rock musicians, after some flirtations with minimalism's intellectual base, drew back into mainstream rock styles.

Fripp himself has denied that Reich had any direct influence on his work; when he made *No Pussyfooting* with Brian Eno in 1972, an album often cited as one of the crucial minimalism-rock connections, Fripp had heard neither the music of Reich nor of Glass (though Eno had). Later, Fripp got to know Reich's work and said he enjoyed it, but only to a degree: "It takes me to a point at which something really interesting could happen, but doesn't quite make that jump. Because it is preconceived and orchestrated. What I should personally like to do is to add the random factor, the factor of hazard, to what he's doing, to walk on stage unexpectedly during one of his performances and having become familiar with the tonal center, improvise over the top of it." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

The "factor of hazard" is to Fripp an important criterion for judging the effectiveness of music. In the previous chapter we discussed his dissatisfaction with making records: the human factor of interaction between musicians and audience, the creative process, the "way of doing things," the factor of hazard, are difficult if not impossible to capture on recordings. For similar reasons, he has repeatedly remarked that he is "not really a record listener." *(Watts 1980, 22)* Fripp says, "For me, music is the performance of music," while allowing that "of course, if you

don't go to Bulgaria very much, the best way for you to hear a Bulgarian women's choir is on record." *(Drozdowski 1989, 36)*

Pundits have debated for years the difference between popular music and art music. Fripp doesn't use the word "art" much, but he has voiced a down-to-earth distinction between what he calls "popular culture" and "mass culture": "Popular culture is when it's very, very good and everyone knows it and goes 'yeah!' Mass culture is when it's very, very bad and we all know it and we go 'yeah!' Mass culture works on like and dislike, and popular culture addresses the creature we aspire to be. Examples of popular culture: Beatles, Dylan, Hendrix." Although critical of mass culture from what might be called an aesthetic point of view, Fripp does not dismiss it entirely. He feels that under certain circumstances mass culture can be used for the good, citing the Live Aid concert in England – an event which awakened in people a genuine spirit of caring and generosity, regardless of cynical questions that were raised regarding how well the money was used and how much help the fund-raising actually did. *(Drozdowski 1989, 34)*

As noted in this chapter's epigraph, Fripp sees rock music as "the most malleable musical form we have." In my book on Brian Eno I defined rock as a specific set of musical style norms (involving certain song forms and rhythmic patterns, certain types of instrumentation and vocal delivery, and so on), in order to show how some rock musicians have gone "beyond rock" into other, new, hybrid musical genres of their own creation. While viewing rock as a musical style complex is interesting enough as an exercise in analytical musicology, in the real world rock is more a spirit than a style, more an audience than a specific type of music. For the sociologist, rock is a demographic bulge; for the record industry, rock is a marketing category, a publicity strategy. Fripp has said, "One can, under the general banner of rock music, play in fact any kind of music whatsoever." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)* I would add only that rock seems to move in cycles – periods of creative diversity followed by periods of stagnation, and that one problem for many musicians is getting their creative music accepted as "rock" by the music industry during periods of industry stagnation.

For Fripp, rock is a democratic music. Although a masterful guitar technician himself, and although he pushes his students to develop their musicianship to the utmost, he acknowledges that in rock, ideas count more than musical competence, sincerity more than virtuosity: virtually anybody who feels the urge can make a musical statement in the language and context of rock, regardless of how well, in classical terms, they can play or sing. The voices of Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, coarse and "untrained" enough to send classical purists into fits of derision, became the voices of whole generations. Eno, though perhaps an extreme case, was so unskilled at playing guitar and keyboard that he called himself a "non-musician." For Fripp, "rock is an immediate expression of something very direct. Rock and roll is therapy on the street, it's available to everyone. Rock and roll is street poetry. It can also be more sophisticated, but it needn't be." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)* For Fripp, "a rock'n'roll audience is always far, far better than any, because they're instinctive, they're on their feet, and they can cut through the pretensions of the performer very quickly." *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)*

As for stylistic qualities, the rhythm or beat of rock – its most salient and consistent musical characteristic, the thing that rock's initiates ecstatically extol while its detractors daintily denigrate – represents to Fripp positive sexual energy, "energy from the waist down." By contrast, developmental harmony – a musical development peculiar to the Western world, and a self-conscious feature of its music really only since the Renaissance – represents to Fripp an intellectual process belonging to the province of the mind. *(Watts 1980, 22)* Since his earliest music with King Crimson, Fripp has been interested in combining these two sources of energy,

the physical and the mental, rhythm and harmony – making, as well as speaking out on behalf of, rock music that could "appeal to the head as well as the foot." *(Garbarini 1979, 31)*

Fripp came to believe, however, that many of the progressive rock groups of the early 1970s were not so much intrigued with the intangible spirit of King Crimson – that special way of listening, of doing things, of making music – as they were intent on aping Crimson's outer musical vocabulary: the virtuosic musicianship, the epic, extended forms, the exotic harmonies, the quasi-mystical, mythological lyrics, the wide variety of instrumental sound colors. Full-blown Gothic rock was a genre for which Fripp had absolutely no use. Declared a majestically scornful Fripp to John Rockwell of the *New York Times* in 1978: "I don't wish to listen to the philosophical meanderings of some English half-wit who is circumnavigating some inessential point of experience in his life." *(Rockwell 1978, 16)* Fripp's rhetorical attack on the movement he'd helped create continued in his own column in *Musician, Player, and Listener* in the early 1980s, ridiculing "enthusiastic art-rock space cadets whose sudden success seemed to validate pretensions on all levels; they huddled in unholy quorum with pliant engineers to generate excess everywhere." *(Fripp 1980A, 26)*

Fripp's critique of 1970s rock extended to jabs at the stars who had let themselves get fat: in his view, they "became more interested in country houses and riding in limousines, expensive personal habits and all that. The rock musicians who were public figures in the 70's copped out, and now we have cynicism towards our public figures that is wholly justified." *(Grabel 1982, 58)*

Fripp related a story in 1979 that indicated the depths of his disillusionment with the rock fantasy. In August 1975, when King Crimson III had been defunct for a year, Fripp having broken it up at least in part because of the impossible contradictions he had been trying to reconcile between his concept of music and the conditions imposed by rock industry realities, he went to hear a rock show at the Reading Festival: "We'd been waiting an hour and a half while their laser show was being set up. I went out to the front. It began to rain. I was standing in six inches of mud. It was drizzling. A man over here on my right began to vomit. A man over here to my left pulled open his flies and began to urinate over my leg. Behind me there were some 50,000 people who maybe for two or three evenings a week, for amusement, for recreation, would participate in this imaginary world of rock'n'roll. Then I looked at the group on stage – their lasers shooting off ineffectually into the night, locked into this same dream. Except *they're* in it for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for the rest of their lives." *(Jones 1979A, 20)*

Robert Fripp has felt the agonizing paradox of rock: on the one hand, the possibility of a real magic synthesis, the merging of body/soul/rhythm and mind/spirit/harmony, the seemingly infinite malleability of the basic forms, the potential for direct communication between artists who are passionately committed to ideas and an audience that cuts through artistic pretension and snobbery; on the other hand, the reality of rock as escapist entertainment, the greed, the homogenization of taste through the corporate structure of the recording and radio industries, the tendency to aim for the lowest common denominator of mass culture, the meaningless repetition of formulas, the very unhealthiness of the typical rock lifestyle itself: the star syndrome, the drugs, the pointlessness of wasted talents and lives.

Both punk/new wave and disco, those musical explosions of the mid-1970s that so many felt to be diametrically opposed to each other, Fripp felt as a breath of fresh air. Both seemed to him to be music of the people, to return music to the people, throwing the dinosaurs of the music industry off track, however temporarily. The raw energy of punk had been prefigured by the aggressive intellectual heavy metal sound of King Crimson III – and even earlier by the intense negative energy and profound frustration that bursts through King Crimson I songs like "21st Century Schizoid Man." Fripp said, "When I heard punk I thought, I've been waiting six years

for this." *(Grabel 1979, 32)* As for disco, Fripp called it "a political movement that votes with its feet. It started out as the expression of two disadvantaged communities – the gays and the blacks." As a vital form of social expression, Fripp viewed disco as "nihilistic, but passively nihilistic," a movement that simply ignored the traditional social framework outside its boundaries. *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

Robert Fripp believes that one can learn just as much by listening to music one dislikes as by listening to music one likes – in other words, that there can be an educational purpose served by music beyond that of satisfying mere subjective taste. "I go and see people who I don't like because I get something from it which is worth far more than having been entertained." *(Watts 1980, 22)* Rock writer Michael Watts characterizes this view as "puritanical"; puritanical or not, it is consistent with Fripp's view that the quality of attention one brings to the experience of music is more decisive than the quality of the musical sounds in themselves. Not the sounds, but the listening.

Many of the musicians Fripp has mentioned in interviews over the years are jazz or jazz-rock players – Ornette Coleman, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Tony Williams, Frank Zappa. One name that pops up repeatedly is Jimi Hendrix, whom Fripp cites as an example of pure embodiment of the spirit of music. The intensity of the musical current flowing through Hendrix is what killed him in the end, according to Fripp. Hendrix's guitar technique itself, however, "was inefficient and, as an example, misled many young guitarists." *(Fripp 1975)*

It seems Fripp has never been able to muster much enthusiasm for listening to guitarists for the sake of listening to guitarists. He has peevishly and somewhat inscrutably characterized his chosen tool as "a pretty feeble instrument." Post-Mayall-Bluesbreakers Eric Clapton he found "quite banal," while Jeff Beck he could "appreciate as good fun." *(Rosen 1974, 18)* Of the entire 1970s and 1980s crop of rock guitarists, Fripp has said little; indeed he hasn't appeared particularly interested. The whole rush to synthesizer guitars, MIDI, and digital signal processing in the 1980s left Fripp unimpressed. He did use the technology for his own purposes in King Crimson IV and with Andy Summers, even deigning to endorse the GR-300 synthesizer guitar in Roland advertisements in 1982. But he is not especially thrilled with new sounds for the sake of new sounds, particularly if the new sounds are merely poor imitations of old sounds: "Why would a world-class guitar player [playing a guitar synthesizer] settle for sounding like a third-rate saxophone player, and then a trumpet player and then a synthesizer player?" *(Drozdowski 1989, 36)*

Taking on the Classics

Some of Fripp's most perplexing comments on other music concern the Western art music tradition. On the one hand, the music of some of that tradition's masters has figured prominently in Fripp's own musical self-education. He has often acknowledged his debt to Bartok, particularly the Bartok of the String Quartets, many of whose movements sound positively Frippian, with their intense linear counterpoint, percussive rhythms, odd metrical schemes, extended tonality, exotic scales, and piquant dissonances. Stravinsky's name comes up from time to time, as when Fripp mentioned the Russian in a discussion of tuning, temperament, and enharmonic pitch notation *(Mulhern 1986, 99)*; on another occasion he called early Stravinsky "really hot stuff." *(Garbarini 1979, 32*) Fripp expressed admiration for Handel, Bach, Mozart, and Verdi in a 1980 essay, but he was not focussing on their music so much as he was making the

point that these composers had had to teach themselves how to thrive creatively while working in "very difficult political and economic conditions ... Surely the most surprising point is how much inspired work had prosaic origins." *(Fripp 1980G, 30)*

On the other hand, Fripp's assessment of the classical tradition as a living, functional organism is not particularly generous. His collaborator Eno has been blunt about it: "Classical music is a dead fish." *(Doerschuk 1989, 95)* Fripp is more restrained, but has expressed major reservations about the classical orchestra's viability as a source of a quality musical experience for the musicians – and hence for the audience. As a form of musical organization, Fripp has called the classical orchestra a "dinosaur" – gigantic, lumbering, possessing little discerning intelligence, and overdue for extinction. Although he can respect the discipline of orchestra life and musicianship, Fripp himself "would find it very frustrating" to be an orchestral player: "How awful that the only person who is expressing himself is the composer, with the conductor as the chief of police and the musicians as sequencers ... It's *stuck.* There is a cap on how far it can go. There is a cap on what it can *do.*" And then Fripp moves on to his own agenda: "Within the league of crafty guitarists ... the aim is not to follow any one person but to be sensitive to the group as a whole and respond to the group as a whole." *(Mulhern 1986, 96)*

According to Fripp, Beethoven was undoubtedly one of the "Great Masters," with direct access to music at its creative source. But listening to Beethoven's music today, "transcribed through two hundred years of interpretation and analysis and a sixty piece orchestra with an intelligent conductor", is for Fripp an indirect, incomplete experience. He would much rather have been present to hear Beethoven improvise at the piano in person. "My personal reaction listening to the [Beethoven] String Quartets is not the sense of passion that was obviously present at the moment when it came through. Rather I feel a sense of how remarkably intelligent it is, but I don't get that direct touch that I'm sure Beethoven had, which I've had from the rock band Television." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

The Guitar Craft repertoire is by and large learned by rote and performed from memory. One afternoon in February 1986 Fripp and a bunch of his students were standing around the coffee urn during a Guitar Craft seminar discussing the pros and cons of notated music. Fripp's final word on the topic was, "I'd much rather have a date with my girlfriend than get a letter from her." It appears he won't budge from his basic position, which is that the process of playing from notation inevitably takes music "further and further away from the original moment of conception." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

This position is congruent with Fripp's professed mistrust of written media and recorded sound – perhaps strange for someone who has put out so many records and published so many articles, and is consistent with his insistence that the highest form of musical experience can take place only in a situation of direct human contact. To musicians who have tasted the rewards of a close, devoted study of masters like Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart – through live performances, keyboard score-reading, recorded media, and the process of intuitive analysis – this is a tough pill to swallow.

A parallel might be drawn between reading a Bach score and reading the Bible. Moses' or Jesus' impact was undoubtedly most intensely felt in person – just as to hear Bach improvise a fugue on the organ or harpsichord must have been an awe-inspiring experience, at least to those present with the ears to hear and the musical preparation to understand what was happening. Yet without notation, Bach's fugues, which through writing out he was able to refine to high levels of perfection, would be lost to history. I for one am glad to have the Bible and the *Well-Tempered Clavier* on my shelf.

Of course, whenever you have spiritual or musical masters around whom a written tradition accrues, you inevitably have latter-day disciples of all colors and stripes who battle among themselves to claim the "true" interpretation, or, worse, believe that salvation lies somehow in the written documents themselves rather than in direct personal contact with the source. Perhaps, like a modern musical Martin Luther, Fripp is saying that we can all have direct contact with music through faith and effort, that to speak directly with God we don't need all the accumulated ritual, regulation, and written tradition, that arguing for the inherent superiority of the written art music canon is something like arguing in the manner of contemporary Christian fundamentalists in favor of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy at the expense of unmediated personal faith.

Classical musicians play notes that are written and fixed on paper. Guitar Craft performances consist of music that appears to be carefully composed and tightly disciplined, as if the musicians are simply doing their best to execute some sort of pre-conceived composition. But in theory, or in the ideal, there is an element of improvisation in both classical and Guitar Craft performances: according to Fripp, the guitarists "can play any note they like provided it's the right one". *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)* It seems to me that in any kind of musical performance situation there will always be a danger of the musician falling into unconsciousness, relying on technique alone, and becoming in effect a sound-producing automaton.

In order to place Fripp's approach in perspective, perhaps a bit of historical background would be helpful. The Western art music tradition has a rich history of performers taking all kinds of liberties with the written score, in many instances in effect completely re-composing it, whether in actual notation or in the heat of an inspired performance. Many composers have also been improvisers, able to develop and transform themes into new creations on the spot. It was really only with the rise of positivist musicology in the twentieth century that this sort of thing went out of favor and that improvisation, in the art-music world, became a lost art. Nowadays, indeed, the original composer's "intentions" are widely held to be primary and inviolable, and the best performances are commonly deemed to be those most closely in accord with those sacrosanct intentions.

In the twentieth century, positivist musicologists have industriously cleaned up the music of the masters, assiduously sweeping out all the editorial additions that had crept in through the nineteenth century, getting back to the composers' manuscripts and first published editions in order to take a new, refreshed look at the music in its original form (though often enough, with composers' revisions, discrepancies between sources, and so on, reconstructing the "original" score can be a bit of a headache, to the point that doubt may be cast on the very concept of a single "original score" or *Urtext*). This cleaning-up was a first step; the second stage, now in full swing, is the movement toward faithful reproduction of historically authentic performance practices involving the use of period instruments, original scores, and all the knowledge of style, ornamentation, improvisation, and so on, that musicology can manage to dig up.

In the contemporary historical performance scene, opportunities for whole new ranges of use and abuse of knowledge have opened up. On the one hand, the educated musician can respond to the situation by contacting the spirit behind the music and – not slavishly but with considered knowledge – playing with a range of embellishments and other expressive elements (tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and so on) not literally specified by the raw notes in the score but called for by the spirit of the music, internalized in the sensitive performer through study and practice. On the other hand, the historical performance movement is all too full of musicians and

academic authorities squabbling over obscure details of musical praxis, not unlike scholastic medieval theologians squabbling over the "correct" interpretation of a verse of Scripture.

The music of every historical period calls for different kinds of interpretation, and it is probably true that there is more freedom in interpreting the music of the eighteenth century and earlier than nineteenth- and twentieth-century music, since in recent times composers have become more and more meticulous in notating their intentions with regard to every last nuance of expression. Be this as it may, surely one can speak of a range of possible interpretations of a given piece of classical music; when all that is played is the notes, with no hint of internalization of the style, of the *music* – such playing is (and has always been, I suppose) the bane of music departments and performance spaces around the world. But assuming cultivated sensitivity and intuitive musicality on the classical player's part, performance of the traditional repertoire can surely approach Fripp's ideal of a music where one can play any note one likes "provided it's the right one."

One thorny problem for classical musicians is that it's just so awfully difficult to "improve" on what Bach, Mozart, and the lot wrote down on paper. To anyone who has not fully fathomed such composers' consummate mastery nor directly felt the complex yet elegant system of emotional and structural checks and balances built into the interrelationships among even the smallest details in such music, this is probably impossible to explain.

With the possible exception of free-form avant-garde jazz, all music that I know of has a "program" of some sort, that is, a tacit or explicit set of conventions and directions to be followed; the paradox is that the sensitivity and meaningfulness of the performance increases in proportion to the degree the musician surrenders the ego to the will of the music itself. This is as true of the King Crimson or Guitar Craft repertoire as it is of the classical. And it is no different even in most forms of "free" improvisation – the musician is not starting in a vacuum but, with the technique at his or her disposal, is drawing on his or her total knowledge of music (scales, theory, harmony, sense of rhythm, sense of continuity, principles of unity and contrast, and so on). Music plays *through* the performer, conditioned in a sense by the performer's individual knowledge, experience, taste, and talent, but (in those rare moments) transcending such limitations and manifesting itself as Music in a pure state.

We have already noted Fripp's lament, "How awful that the only person who is expressing himself [in classical orchestral music] is the composer." Fripp has also said, "Whenever a musician is interested in self-expression you know it's gonna suck." *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)* Does anyone except myself sense yet another paradox lurking shadow-like in these two statements? Chew them over for a while; we will return to them in the final chapter.

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Chapter Four: King Crimson I

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the far north:

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the depths of the pit.

– Isaiah 14:12-15

Beginnings: Working Up a Red Head of Steam

Fripp was born in Wimbourne, a village ten miles outside Bournemouth. We know little about the young Bob Fripp's life; occasional tidbits filter down through the press, such as that his favorite subjects in school were English and English literature. *(Dery 1985, 51)* Only very rarely has Fripp exposed anything about his childhood in interviews. One such instance was in 1980, when he talked about the double binds he found himself in as a boy, and which he later managed to work through in transactional analysis: "My parents made me crazy. My father didn't want children and I'd say 'Mum, Father's irritable' and she'd say 'no he's not!' and there's my father boxing me round the ears. So how can you process that information and experience?" *(Recorder Three, 1980, n.p.)*

From the age of eleven, when his parents had bought him his first guitar on December 24, 1957, Fripp had known that music was to be his life. From the age of fourteen, he had various miscellaneous performing experiences, playing guitar in hotels and restaurants and backing up singers. He soaked up influences: first American rockers like Scotty Moore, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry; a bit later, Django Reinhardt and modern jazz.

A turning point was reached at the age of seventeen; as Fripp describes it, "I went to stay with my sister on holiday in Jersey. And I took my guitar. I had lots of opportunities to practice there, which I found quite wonderful. It was there that I established a deeper relationship with the instrument. And upon returning home to England, I announced to my mother, 'I am going to become a professional guitar player.' My mother didn't try to dissuade me. She simply burst into tears. I took her reaction to heart and my decision was delayed until I was twenty." *(Milkowski 1984, 29-30)*

Fripp's steadiest gig, beginning at age eighteen, was a three-year stint at the Majestic Hotel, in the band hired to entertain the Hebrew Fraternity of Bournemouth. If it is difficult to imagine Robert Fripp meekly chiming in on twists, foxtrots, tangos, waltzes, the Jewish National Anthem, Hava Nagilah, and "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen," consider that he got the job when the young Andy Summers (later guitarist for the Police) vacated the post to go to London. *(Garbarini 1984, 39)*

In the meantime, Fripp was being groomed by his father to take over the latter's small real estate firm; having worked for his father for three years, Fripp felt that to educate himself further in the business he should get away from the office. He studied for a year and a half at Bournemouth College, taking A-levels in economics, economic history, and political history; the idea was to go to London and pursue a degree in estate management.

But at the age of twenty Fripp decided, in his own words, that he "could no longer be a dutiful son" *(Drozdowski 1989, 31)* and resolved to have a go at the music business. He felt that "becoming a professional musician would enable me to do all the things in my life that I wanted,"

(Rosen 1974, 18) that it would provide him with the best possible education. He proceeded to form what he has referred to as an "incredibly bad semi-pro band" called Cremation. *(Rosen 1983, 19)* Cremation did land a few gigs, but Fripp ended up canceling most of them – the group was so awful he was afraid of jeopardizing what local musical reputation he had been able to earn.

Nineteen sixty-seven was perhaps the high-water mark of the rock explosion of the 1960s; anything could happen in music, and there was a sense that, for once, the groups that were the best in a creative sense could also be – indeed, often were – the most popular. In provincial Bournemouth, Fripp was catching whiffs of this exhilarating spirit: "I remember driving over to the hotel one night and on the radio I heard *Sgt. Pepper's* for the first time. I tuned in after they'd introduced the album. I didn't know who it was at first, and it terrified me – 'A Day in the Life,' the huge build-up at the end. At about the same time I was listening to Hendrix, Clapton with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the Bartok string quartets, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Dvorak's *New World Symphony* ... they all spoke to me in the same way. It was all music. Perhaps different dialects, but it was all the same language. At that point, it was a call which I could not resist ... From that point to this very day [1984], my interest is in how to take the energy and spirit of rock music and extend it to the music drawing on my background as part of the European tonal harmonic tradition. In other words, what would Hendrix sound like playing Bartok?" *(Milkowski 1984, 30)*

Giles, Giles and Fripp

In Bournemouth in the spring of 1967, Fripp auditioned for a position in a band being formed by drummer Michael Giles and bassist Peter Giles. The trio rehearsed and moved to London that fall to work a gig accompanying a singer in an Italian restaurant. The gig fell through after a week, but Giles, Giles and Fripp persevered through 1968, managing to appear on a couple of television shows and to record and release two singles ("One in a Million" / "Newlyweds") and "Thursday Morning" / "Elephant Song") and an album, *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp.*

For those whose exposure to Fripp's music begins with King Crimson, the music of *Cheerful Insanity*, now something of a collector's item, might come as a shock. For one thing, it's not in the least heavy – it's a collection of frothy little absurdist ditties. The tunes on Side One are interspersed with Fripp's spoken recital of a sort of tongue-in-cheek morality poem he called "The Saga of Rodney Toady," a fat, ugly lad who is the butt of cruel jokes. We are all familiar with McCartney music-hall nonsense verse along the lines of "Maxwell's Silver Hammer"; a lot of *Cheerful Insanity* is kind of like that – light, whimsical, gently satirical – except that the orchestration is even sillier.

Fripp's playing is accomplished enough, but to hear the Crimson king of Marshall-stacks distortion mildly riffing along in best cocktail-lounge-jazz fashion is a bit of a revelation. Even here, Fripp couldn't resist showing off his chops a little, however; his "Suite No. 1" features him ripping along playing a continuous melody in sixteenth notes at a quarter note of 148 beats per minute. Only two other songs – "The Cruckster," with its jagged, dissonant guitar effects and primitive reverb, and "Erudite Eyes," which sounds at least partially improvised – give any indication of musical paths Fripp was later to follow.

Cheerful Insanity is a very English record. The Hungarian Bartok hadn't quite yet made the acquaintance of the American Hendrix; the album sounds like a collaboration between Monty

Python and the Moody Blues in one of their less pompous moods. After Giles, Giles and Fripp, Fripp's sense of humor may have remained intact in his day-to-day life, but it went decidedly below the surface in his music.

The Genesis of King Crimson I

According to Fripp, on November 15, 1968, King Crimson was "formed in outline between Fripp and Michael Giles in the kitchen following a fruitless session of Giles, Giles and Fripp at Decca." *(YPG, 1)* Fripp summed up the demise of Giles, Giles and Fripp as follows: "The dissolution of Giles, Giles and Fripp followed some 15 months of failure and struggle. We were unable to find even one gig. World sales of the album within the first year were under 600. My first royalty statement showed sales in Canada of 40 and Sweden of 1. Peter Giles left to become a computer operator and finally a solicitor's clerk although played on sessions for a while, notably 'Poseidon' and McDonald and Giles." *(YPG, 1)* (*McDonald and Giles*, released in 1971, was another relatively lightweight affair, though not so bubbly as *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp*; it was ample proof of the divergent directions Fripp and his early collaborators were taking after King Crimson I broke up.)

Drummer Michael Giles, born near Bournemouth in 1942, was the oldest of the members of the original King Crimson lineup. He began playing drums at the age of twelve, and played in jazz and skiffle groups in the 1950s, then in rock bands in the 1960s. When Fripp and Giles decided to form a new group, Fripp's first move was to enlist the services of another Bournemouth native, Greg Lake, a singing guitarist with the group Shame who subsequently switched to bass during his stint with the Gods.

Giles and Fripp then sought out a songwriting team, which turned out to be lyricist Peter Sinfield along with composer and multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald, who could play various reeds and woodwinds as well as vibraphone, guitar, and keyboards. Some of McDonald's early influences were Louis Belson, Les Paul, and Earl Bostic, plus classical composers like Stravinsky and Richard Strauss; during a five-year hitch as an Army bandsman, he had studied traditional orchestration and music theory, and by the time he joined King Crimson he had played in dance bands, rock groups, and classical orchestras.

Both McDonald and Lake were more than competent guitarists; upon joining King Crimson Lake played only bass, and McDonald performed duties on reeds, woodwinds, vibes, and keyboards, leaving Fripp as the sole guitarist. This appears to have been a gesture of deference if not quite a sign of intimidation: as one of the early King Crimson musicians reportedly put it, "When Bob Fripp is in your band, you just don't play guitar." Fripp, in fact, would not actively collaborate with other guitarists until he enlisted the services of Adrian Belew in the 1980s version of King Crimson.

Sinfield had been working as a computer operator when he left the job to found the group Infinity; McDonald was Infinity's guitarist, and after the band's demise (Sinfield later called it "the worst group in the world"), McDonald and Sinfield stayed together in order to keep writing. Sinfield became an "invisible" member of King Crimson, providing words for the songs, acting as road manager and lighting director, and evidently serving as a sort of conduit between the hip London culture and the provincial members of King Crimson, telling them where they should go to buy the right kind of clothes, and so on. Sinfield's role was also that of musical consultant, an in-studio audience off of whom Fripp could bounce ideas. *(Williams 1971, 24)* Although he never performed with Crimson on stage, he was very much part of the evolving group dynamics of the

band until his departure in late 1971. It is to Sinfield that the world owes the Mephistophelean moniker "King Crimson": Fripp relates that "Pete Sinfield was trying to invent a synonym for Beelzebub." *(Schruers 1979, 16)* Beelzebub, prince of demons, the Devil – for Milton in *Paradise Lost* Beelzebub was the fallen angel who ranked just below Satan.

Fripp has told some amusing anecdotes about band and bar life in swinging London in 1969 – for instance, how Greg Lake, with whom he shared a small apartment for a time, regarded him as "inept" in picking up girls, and "took it on himself to give me some help in strategy and maneuvers." *(Fripp 1982A, 35-6)*

On January 13 1969, the first official King Crimson rehearsal took place in the basement of the Fulham Palace Cafe in London – the space that was to become their rehearsal room for the next two and a half years. It would have been fascinating to be a fly on the wall of the basement during the first few months of 1969 – to observe and try to understand how four musicians (and one lyricist) come together and fuse into a single organism. In point of fact, it became a custom for King Crimson to invite an audience of friends to their basement rehearsals, and reports of a powerful new sound began to leak out. Fripp has written of this period: "Following several years of failure we regarded King Crimson as a last attempt at playing something we believed in. Creative frustration was a main reason for the group's desperate energy. We set ourselves impossibly high standards but worked to realize them and with a history of unemployment, palais and army bands, everyone was staggered by the favorable reactions from visitors ... With the fervor of those months I could write for a publicity handout: 'The fundamental aim of King Crimson is to organize anarchy, to utilize the latent power of chaos and to allow the varying influences to interact and find their own equilibrium. The music therefore naturally evolves rather than develops along predetermined lines. The widely differing repertoire has a common theme in that it represents the changing moods of the same five people.'" *(YPG, 2)*

Most of the pieces the group rehearsed were newly composed, but one or two came out of the Giles, Giles and Fripp repertoire, such as "I Talk to the Wind." The group also played through versions of the Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and Joni Mitchell's "Michael from Mountains," which Judy Collins had recorded in an arrangement by Joshua Rifkin on her *Wildflowers* album of 1967. The "feminine," soft-focus yet tightly orchestrated ballad was a feature of most early King Crimson albums; one reporter relates how the group would listen to Judy Collins records to unwind after difficult, tense rehearsals.

At this stage in the evolution of the band, compositional duties tended to be spread over the whole ensemble; for many pieces, it wasn't a matter of one songwriter coming in with a chart and everyone following his directions. Rather, the group played, fought, improvised, ran through numbers, trying to catch the good ideas as they flew by. Curious to find out more about this process, I asked Fripp about it in 1986. What was the genesis of "21st Century Schizoid Man," for instance? Fripp's memory was crystal-clear, and he answered very methodically, "Well, the first few notes – Daaa-da-da-daa-daa-daaaa – were by Greg Lake, the rest of the introduction was Ian McDonald's idea, I came up with the riff at the beginning of the instrumental section, and Michael Giles suggested we all play in unison in the very fast section toward the end of the instrumental." I thought it would be fascinating to know how a number of different King Crimson songs were stitched together like this, but Fripp declined further explication; he didn't think it very interesting or particularly valuable. Perhaps he deemed King Crimson's group identity – its "way of doing things" – more important and relevant than the specific contributions of individual members.

On other occasions, with other writers, Fripp has been a bit more forthcoming with regard to King Crimson's compositional process. He admired and wanted King Crimson to emulate the

Beatles' proclivity for packing many strands of meaning into a song, so that a record could stand up to repeated listenings: "The Beatles achieve probably better than anyone the ability to make you tap your foot first time round, dig the words sixth time round, and get into the guitar slowly panning the twentieth time." Fripp wished Crimson could "achieve entertainment on as many levels as that." Most of King Crimson's recorded music appears to be tightly structured, but in fact the forms have a certain amount of flexibility built in. While architecturally important lead lines that connect the music together are fixed, other elements are variable in live performance, such as the drum patterns, the choice of octave for the melodic parts, and even the harmonies. A great deal depended on the inspiration of the moment: "If you're feeling particularly happy you can even forget the lead line." *(Williams 1971, 24)* In fact, the King Crimson approach appears to be identical in this respect to the Guitar Craft approach mentioned earlier: any note is possible, provided it's the right one.

Time and again, Fripp has called 1969 a "magic" year in his musical development and in the life of the nebulous collective entity known as King Crimson. The experience was intensely powerful, yet heartbreakingly evanescent. When it was over, that is, when King Crimson I effectively broke up at the end of the year, Fripp was faced with trying to understand what had happened. In 1984 he said, "It was a question of: magic has just flown by, how does one find conditions in which magic flies by? I'd experienced it – I knew it was real. So where had it gone, how could one entice it back? That's been the process from then till now." *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Sinfield said it was as though the band had "a Good Fairy. We can't do anything wrong." *(Fripp quoting Sinfield in Milkowski 1985, 61)* Again, Fripp put it this way: "Amazing things would happen – I mean, telepathy, qualities of energy, things that I had never experienced before with music. My own sense of it was that music reached over and played this group of four uptight young men who didn't really know what they were doing." *(Milkowski 1985, 61)*

In the Court of the Crimson King

The residue of this year of magic – the cultural artifact left behind, the spirit of those days frozen into stone (make that vinyl) the enduring physical product resulting from the process – is a long-playing record, released on October 10, 1969, *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation by King Crimson*. A great paradox, a sense of doubt, uncertainty's edge, surrounds this album and virtually all of Robert Fripp's recorded music. He will tell you that "If you record or film an event, you spoil it. A live event has a life of its own, it has a quality that you can never capture on record or video. It's like this: If you're making love with your girlfriend, the video of the event might bring back nice memories. But the event was something infinitely more." *(Milano 1985, 34)* (John Lennon said somewhere, "Talking about music is like talking about fucking. I mean, who wants to talk about it? I suppose some people do want to talk about it ...") Fripp will even go so far as to say that "some of the most amazing gigs I've known weren't 'musically' very good. Just listening to tapes afterward ... I mean, there's a real *turkey* happening. It wasn't down to notes, it was down to an energy in the room, between the band and the people and the music." *(Fripp 1982B, 58)*

What does one make of this? On the one hand, as a musician I too have felt that ineffable energy of really cooking – the music, the musicians, the audience, all in it together, all one – and listening to the tape later, indeed, have had cause to wonder puzzledly what the big deal was really all about: it was there, somewhere, but evidently, manifestly, it wasn't really in the notes themselves. On the other hand, on the negative side if you will, Fripp's attitude could be seen as a cop-out of sorts: if the residue, the product left behind by the process, is not up to snuff, it's all

too easy to say “My best work has never been recorded and released,” as Fripp frequently does. It’s a clash of philosophies of music we’re dealing with here. Fripp says the music is not in the notes, but rather “music is a quality organized in sound.” *(GC Monograph?)* That *quality* may be there even if the actual (played, sounding) *music* isn’t anything special from a compositional point of view. Indeed, that quality may be present in a single note, or in silence itself. In the Western tradition of musical composition, these ideas don’t quite make it: at the core of the Western tradition is an accumulation of acknowledged masterpieces, musical scores – testaments, epistles, prophecies – in which it is deemed the hidden knowledge of music resides, to be sought and found and brought to life by the initiate with the right stuff to feel and understand what is really going on there.

Philosophy aside, here we have this piece of plastic, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, which, in some sense or other, contains the music of the group’s magical year, 1969. The response in the rock press could have been predicted: some writers enthusiastically proclaimed it the music of the future (that is, of the 1970s); macho types endorsed the metal screech of “Schizoid Man” while dismissing “I Talk to the Wind” as weak and derivative; comparisons were drawn with the Beatles, Pink Floyd, the Moody Blues, and Procol Harum. Some found the album pretentious, others awe-inspiring. It is a delight to read the incorrigible Lester Bangs grappling with Crimson’s “myth, mystification, and mellotrons,” subsuming the band’s titanic efforts under his own peculiarly American way of seeing things: “King Crimson would like you to think that they’re strange, but they’re not. What they are is a semi-eclectic British band with a penchant for fantasy and self-indulgence whose banally imagistic lyrics are only matched by the programmatic imagery of their music.” *(Bangs 1972, 58)*

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21ST CENTURY SCHIZOID MAN (by Fripp, McDonald, Lake, Giles, and Sinfield). Ominous night sounds. An in-your-face metal phrase. Lake screaming the lyrics, voice electronically fuzzed. “Cat’s foot iron claw / Neuro-surgeons scream for more / At paranoia’s poison door / Twenty-first century schizoid man.” Long blisteringly fast instrumental solo section, then unisons at unreal tempo. Grinding downshift to metal lick, final verse, free noise, and out. What can be said about “Schizoid Man” after all these years? It instantly became Crimson’s signature, their anthem, their opener, their war-horse, their sine qua non – a mixed blessing, like Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind,” since for years afterward, it was all many people came to hear Crimson for. It set up expectations, it put the band in a box: “Why can’t you do more stuff like ‘Schizoid Man’?” Perhaps the song succeeded in giving Fripp’s public iconic persona a certain authority – it established his masculinity, it made a man out of him. Thereafter he knew you knew he could stand in and thrash with the heavies; having proved that, he could go on and tackle other worlds.

Consider the meter. Count out the number of beats in the opening metal phrase: sixteen. But good luck feeling the music in terms of four bars of 4/4: the accents are all off. To write it out, the best way might be with measures of three, two, three, three, three, and two beats. This way at least the two sub-phrases begin on downbeats:

```
        ||:3        |2        |3        |3        |3        |2      :||
        ||:4        |4        |4        |4        |4        |4      :||
Accents:  ^                              ^         ^         ^
          First phrase ................   Second phrase ................
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Fine and good. But now go ahead and try counting the whole thing as four measures of 4/4: if you succeed, and simultaneously feel the accents of the music itself (which are not for the most part coinciding with your counting) you are *ipso facto* in the realm of Frippian polymeter, revealed here in the very first King Crimson song.

Composition in broad gestures (bold, angular melodic profiles, striking textural contrasts, clear-cut formal schemes, sharply differentiated contrapuntal planes); overpowering intensity of conception and execution; meter and tempo changes, metrical modulation within a single piece; the fuzzy, sustained-note-type guitar lead, along with a tendency to use either very many or very few notes; *concrete* sound sources (the night sounds at the beginning); a passion for frenetic group sound/noise layers (at the end) ... it is remarkable how many stylistic traits we would later come to recognize as characteristically Frippian are packed into this germinal piece.

So ... is this what Hendrix would sound like playing Bartok?

"Schizoid Man" floors you (the metal riff), terrifies you (the sung verses), tries as hard as it can to dazzle and impress you (the fast instrumental section), does it all again, and then blows itself to smithereens ... and leads without a break into "I Talk to the Wind" ...

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King Crimson I Live

King Crimson played seventy-eight official gigs in 1969, beginning with a show at London's Speakeasy on April 9. The group played fifty-eight additional British gigs from April to October; Crimson's first American tour took place in November and December. During this tour they shared the bill with many of the leading groups of the day: Al Kooper, Iron Butterfly, Poco, the Band, Jefferson Airplane, Joe Cocker, Fleetwood Mac, the Voices of East Harlem, the Chambers Brothers, the Rolling Stones, Johnny Winter, Country Joe and the Fish, Janis Joplin, Sly and the Family Stone, Spirit, Grand Funk Railroad, Pacific Gas and Electric, the Nice, and others. By many accounts, King Crimson out-heavied them all.

Robert Fripp would always contend that King Crimson, in all of its incarnations, was a live band first and a recording-studio band only secondarily. He has never expressed unqualified endorsement of any King Crimson record, insisting, like Bob Dylan, that the whole point for him has been making contact with a real audience in real time. Early on, in 1971, Fripp stressed the importance of crowd feedback, of "a feeling of involvement with the audience." *(Williams 1971, 24)* Paradoxically, audience members at Crimson concerts have often felt Fripp to be distant, removed, unresponsive – locked in a world of his own, making few efforts to engage them directly. This perception was reinforced by his practice, adopted after only the first eight gigs in 1969, of sitting on a stool onstage while performing. When interviewers would ask him, "Why do you sit down on stage?," Fripp would respond, "Because you can't play guitar standing up. At least I can't." He felt it wasn't his "job to stand up and look moody. My job was to play, and I couldn't play standing up." *(Rosen 1974, 18)* It was a matter of concentration: "There are some things that are far easier to play standing up, and if it's a very physical thing that's required, you don't want to be anchored too much, whereas if it's something which requires a fair amount of concentration and technique you can sit down and just concentrate on it." *(Williams 1971, 23-4)* But it was also a matter of Fripp's rejecting what he called the "show biz thing," the specter of empty gestures in the name of entertainment that forever haunts rock performances. He said wryly, "I can see the beauty of Emerson, ligging about the organ, but I could never do it and make it work satisfactorily. It'd look false, because that's not the kind of bloke I am." *(Williams 1971, 23)* Consider something John Lennon said in 1970: "The Beatles deliberately didn't move

like Elvis, that was our policy, because we found it stupid and bullshit. And then Mick Jagger came out and resurrected bullshit movement, you know, wiggling your arse and that. So then people began to say, 'Well, the Beatles are passe because they don't move.' But we did it as a conscious thing." *("Lennon Remembers," 34)*

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I TALK TO THE WIND. According to the album credits this is not a Fripp piece; it was written by Ian McDonald and Pete Sinfield. I always had trouble with this song: it seemed to take a long time (five minutes and forty seconds) to say not much of anything. There is some beautiful linear counterpoint – that is to say, the harmonies result from the directional leading of individual melodic lines – and the gentle clash of major and minor modes is poignant enough. But in the final analysis the value of "I Talk to the Wind" has more to do with its formal function on Side A of the record than with any intrinsic musical merit: you've got to have *something* soft and seductive between "Schizoid Man" and "Epitaph." An idyllic interlude between the rape and the prophecy. I'm just not sure it had to be this long. "I Talk to the Wind" leads without a break into "Epitaph" ...

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Judging from concert reviews of the 1969 British and American tours, King Crimson had a way of flattening audiences and upstaging the acts it was supposed to be supporting. (Fripp reports that the Moody Blues refused to undertake a joint tour with King Crimson: he says Graham Edge of the Moodies felt that King Crimson "were simply too strong." *[YPG, 2]*) The music was loud, it was powerful, it was gut-wrenching, it was an unbelievable wall of sound. *Melody Maker* writer Alan Lewis reported on the concert King Crimson did with the Nice at Fairfield Hall in Croyden on October 17: Crimson played "21st Century Schizoid Man," "Epitaph," "Trees" (never recorded), the "incredibly heavy" "Court of the Crimson King," and closed with "Mars" from Holst's *Planets* suite, "hammering out the menacing riff over an eerie wail from Ian McDonald's mellotron. Together with Peter Sinfield's brilliant lights, they created an almost overpowering atmosphere of power and evil." *(Lewis 1969, 6)* In Lewis's view, the classical/rock menagerie of the Nice was no match for Crimson's aggressive presence. In the nascent world of progressive rock, perhaps Keith Emerson was the movement's McCartney, Robert Fripp its Lennon – the Lennon of the primal scream.

Similarly, Chris Albertson, reviewing for *Down Beat* a Fillmore East (New York) concert in November where King Crimson opened for Fleetwood Mac and Joe Cocker, judged that Crimson was "clearly the superior group and all that followed was anti-climactic." Albertson noted the quality of the group's material, the extraordinarily high level of musicianship, the collective improvisation, and the jazz influence, concluding, "King Crimson has majestically arrived, proving that neither the Beatles nor Stones were the last word from England." *(Albertson 1970, 20-21)* Only a few months after their formation, King Crimson were being placed in fairly heady company. E. Ochs sketched his impressions of KC I live at the Fillmore East for *Billboard* readers: "King Crimson, royal relative and fellow heavy to Deep Purple, outweighed Joe Cocker and Reprise's Fleetwood Mac 10 tons to two ... when the new Atlantic group clashed ear-splitting volume with well-integrated jazz, yielding a symphonic explosion that made listening compulsory, if not hazardous ... King Crimson can only be described as a monumental heavy with all the majesty – and tragedy – of Hell ... King Crimson drove home the point of their musical philosophy with the volume turned up so high on their amplifiers that, had they been electric blankets, they would have all broiled to death. Not to mention third-degree burns in the

audience. The group's immense, towering force field, electrified by the energy of their almost frightening intensity, either pinned down patrons or drove them out." *(Ochs 1969, 22)*

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EPITAPH including MARCH FOR NO REASON and TOMORROW AND TOMORROW (by Fripp, McDonald, Lake, Giles, and Sinfield). The Gothic rock ballad is born. Slow gloomy minor key mellotron-rich. Sinfield's text meditates pessimistically on the failure of old truths to bring meaning into contemporary existence ("The wall on which the prophets wrote / is cracking at the seams"), on the threat posed by the proliferation of technological means unchecked by a guiding moral vision ("Knowledge is a deadly friend / when no one sets the rules"), and on the bleak prospects the future holds (in the words of the refrain, "Confusion will be my epitaph / as I crawl a cracked and broken path / If we make it we can all sit back and laugh / But I fear tomorrow I'll be crying").

It gets down to what you can say in a slow (positive: deliberate, stately, majestic ... negative: plodding, interminable, insufferable) rock song. Fripp has always contended that rock is our most malleable contemporary musical media: that you can say anything with it. Crimson was obviously going for the Big Statement here. Maybe Sinfield bit off more than he could chew; some of his metaphors are on the labored side, in danger of collapsing under their own weight: "... the seeds of time were sown / and watered by the deeds of those / who know and who are known." It may not be Shakespeare, but the lyrics are really no more grandiose than the music, and in 1969 there was still an innocence about efforts like this to combine classical gigantism with rock, romantic lyric poetry with repetitive rock melodic types.

Consider the long fade-out: the progression VI-v in the key of E minor repeated eighteen times to gloomy vocalizations and clanging electric guitar dissonances. The harmonic domain is thus modal – in effect, B-Phrygian. Whether or not it was Fripp who contributed this modal chord progression, he was increasingly to draw on modal vocabulary in subsequent works, as an alternative to traditional major/minor tonality.

Fripp's guitar work: electric guitar is used at selected points of emphasis, but the primary guitar sound is acoustic strumming and arpeggiation: like virtually all of Fripp's "rhythm" guitar work, it never falls into incessantly repeated strumming patterns, but rather is animated by a highly imaginative textural instinct.

Consider, too, the minor tonality. Minor. Minor. It has to be minor. All the songs on *In the Court of the Crimson King* are in minor, except "I Talk to the Wind," which is *sort of* in minor, but veers major at cadence points. Minor: traditionally the mode of sadness, regret, the dark side of life, despair, anger, sorrow, angst, depression, uncertainty, pathos, bathos, bittersweetness, ending, finality, death.

For all its minorishness, "Epitaph" is completely conventional harmonically, and sounds indeed harmonically rather than linearly conceived. I don't know if it was Fripp who came up with the chord progression. But as his development progressed, he became less attached to traditional functional harmony; his textures became increasingly contrapuntal (with complex figurations of a harmonically implicative rather than declamatory nature replacing homophonically-conceived chord progressions); and in general rhythm, melody, texture, and timbre took precedence over harmony as the most significant purveyors of musical meaning.

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For Fripp, Lake, McDonald, Giles, and Sinfield, touring had its hazards. At the focal point of the tremendous energies being unleashed, the band, according to *Melody Maker* reporter B.P.

Fallon, would "admit to being physically and mentally shattered" at the end of a performance. *(Fallon 1969, 7)* Giles wrote a column for the same British magazine, describing the rigors of playing America's large venues, meetings with other musicians, and the endless waiting that accompanies road life; there is an undertone of despair in his prose, even as he describes future projects King Crimson was discussing, such as writing, performing, and possibly recording a "modern symphony" for twelve or so "leaders in modern musical attitudes." *(Giles 1969, 23)* The impression is that even on the road, the members of the group at times had access to a furious white-hot creative maelstrom. On the other hand, the primary challenge seems to have been simply to avoid boredom and stay in touch with the music. Fripp indicated there was only one way he could keep himself together: "My answer to American hotel life was to put the TV on and practice for eight hours a day." *(Williams 1971, 24)*

It was perhaps inevitable that the strains would rip the group apart. By the end of December, Mike Giles and Ian McDonald had officially announced their departure from King Crimson. Giles was quoted as saying: "I felt that sitting in a van, an aeroplane and hotel rooms was a waste of time even if you are getting a great deal of money for it. Ian and I feel that we'd rather have less money and do more creative, interesting and fulfilling things with all the travelling time. The main thing is for Ian and I to write and record using musicians of similar attitude with the accent on good music – really doing what we feel we should be doing with a lot of emphasis on production. Part of the reason for the split was that I didn't feel I could do this within King Crimson and they need the freedom to follow through what they need to do." *(Eldridge 1970, 13)* Sinfield thought the split had to do with personalities: Lake and Fripp were by nature "strong, very forceful, almost pushy," while McDonald and Giles were "very, very receptive." Sinfield, who felt his personality was somewhere in the middle, said that the combination of the five "could and did work to a degree but the pressure got too much for Ian and Mike." *(Eldridge 1970, 13)* For his part, McDonald expressed dissatisfaction with the overall tone of the music as it had developed. The gloom-and-doom aspect, he had decided, was not him: "I want to make music that says good things instead of evil things." *(Nick Logan, "Replacements,"* NME *(Jan. 24 1979), quoted in YPG, 7)*

On December 7th, after four dates on consecutive nights at Hollywood's Whisky A Go Go, McDonald and Giles told Fripp of their decision to leave. Fripp's reaction appears to have been shock: "My stomach disappeared. King Crimson was everything to me. To keep the band together I offered to leave instead but Ian said that the band was more me than them." *(YPG, 6)* Fripp's view was that King Crimson had taken on an autonomous life of its own; it was an idea, a concept, a way of doing things, a channel, a living organism; music had spoken through it. He put it simply: "King Crimson was too important to let die." *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

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MOONCHILD including THE DREAM and THE ILLUSION (by McDonald and Sinfield). Twelve minutes and nine seconds. You see, the thing is, I've been in jams like this. The feeling is totally there among the musicians (and whoever else happens to be sitting around, whether they've paid for it or not, probably, and preferably, not). You are close to silence, Silence with a capital S. You are in tune with silence, the deepest sound of them all. Every sound, therefore, that you make, make with intention, sensitivity, and awareness, has a meaning, an ineffability, a significance. You are listening, Listening with a capital L. You hear what everyone else is doing; you do whatever is necessary, which is usually as little as possible. It has nothing to do with self-expression: it has to do with a group mind. And yes, it is possible to become a group mind, to feel that sense of immersion in something so immeasurably greater and lighter and more sensitive and more conscious than your own paltry, complex-ridden, neurotic, solipsistic, pathetic

self. And no, such moments cannot really be anticipated and *made* to happen (although one can gain a certain expertise at setting up the conditions for them to happen). And yes, when those moments do happen it is all enough, the music, the sense of the music happening as it were of its own will and to its own purposes – you are in tune with the vibration of nature itself, you are its instrument – it is playing you and you are merely the rapt spectator of this spectacular play of sound in all its parameters which seem so lucidly *there*, so transparent, so available, all you have to do is stretch out your hand to feel its warmth, its fullness, its loving and terrifying infinity, there is nothing else you need or ever will need. BUT – but: ... the bitch of it all is that you put some of this stuff on tape and it just sounds like the most unbelievably aimless doodling, like the random toning of the wind chimes blowing on your front porch, or traffic noises outside your window. THEN you are faced with a philosophical bugaboo. Because, you see, music, in its very essence, is too great, too vast, too intangibly infinitesimal, too subtle for human conception. You are stuck with the sense that you might as well contemplate the sound of that wind chime on your porch, or listen to the screen door's periodic groans and slams, or listen to the sound of your own breathing, or the silent sound of your own thoughts as they careen through the blank void of your pathetic awareness – you might as well do that as listen to this horrid tape you have made or to the residue of some 1969 studio session by five horrid British rock musicians called King Crimson. And well you might.

As it happens, a few of "classical music"'s twentieth-century pantheon of composers were already hip to all this, and endeavored to enlighten recalcitrant audiences through their outrageous acts, pieces, ideas, concepts, noodlings, doodlings, and explications.

One was the American John Cage, (whose final position was, and is, that "everything we do is music") whose "silent" piece, *4'33"* enraged some and entranced others as far back as 1952 (the unavoidable implication of *4'33"* was that the sounds heard when attempting to listen to nothing were just as interesting as any Beethoven masterpiece), who devised methods of composing by chance so the "composer" could get his pathetic personality out of the way and let the perhaps ordered, perhaps random laws of nature speak for themselves – just like the wind chimes.

Another was the German Karlheinz Stockhausen, who took a more psychological, more practical approach, for instance in his 1968 "composition," *Aus den sieben Tagen* (*From the Seven Days*). This is a set of prose instructions for musicians (or I suppose anyone) to follow in order to have a quality musical experience. Among the fifteen "pieces" in *Aus den sieben Tagen*, perhaps the most extreme is "Gold Dust," which reads as follows: "Live completely alone for four days / without food / in complete silence / without much movement / sleep as little as necessary / think as little as possible //after four days, late at night / without conversation beforehand / play single sounds // WITHOUT THINKING which you are playing /// close your eyes / just listen." *(Stockhausen,* 7 Tagen, *?)* But perhaps more pertinent to our discussion of King Crimson 1969 is "It," the piece just before "Gold Dust" in "Aus den sieben Tagen." The instructions for "It" read: "Think NOTHING / wait until it is absolutely still within you / when you have attained this / begin to play // as soon as you start to think, stop / and try to re-attain the state of NON-THINKING / then continue playing."

What would such music sound like? You do not have to guess. "It" was recorded by Deutsche Grammophon in 1968 and you can hear it for yourself. But in case you don't have access to old German pressings (though the record is readily available in most university music department record libraries), it doesn't matter much. It sounds much the same as King Crimson's "Moonchild."

THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING including THE RETURN OF THE FIRE WITCH and THE DANCE OF THE PUPPETS (by McDonald and Sinfield). Along with "Epitaph," this is the album's other mellotron epic. The title track. Hence theme song/anthem for the laddies in the group's early stages, though decidedly nothing like "Here We Come, We're the Monkees." Because it is not a Fripp composition, I will pass it over rather quickly here, except to note: the rather foursquare phraseology, which it would take Fripp a while to get away from; the ubiquitous minor modality; the false (major) ending, as in "I Talk to the Wind"; the odd circus-music woodwind/organ break after the false ending – one of those stark, unreasonable textural/associative contrasts which Fripp was to employ so effectively in later efforts; the Gothic heaviness of it all; and finally the abrupt ending – after having built up a whole album's worth of momentum, a melodramatic climax is avoided in favor of a sort of *musicus interruptus.*

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In retrospect, whatever one felt about this music, the seminal nature of the album cannot be denied: the variegated yet cohesive *In the Court of the Crimson King* helped launch, for better or for worse, not one but several musical movements, among them heavy metal, jazz-rock fusion, and progressive rock. As the *Rolling Stone Record Guide* was to put it some years later, the album "helped shape a set of baroque standards for art-rock." *(RS Record Guide, 1st ed., 204)*

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Chapter Five: King Crimson II

To repeat excessively is to enter into loss; this we term the zero of the signified.

– Roland Barthes

After the breakup of King Crimson I in December 1969 a period of some two and a half years ensued during which Fripp struggled to keep Crimson alive and in some sense intact as a recording band, performing outfit, and concept. To make the almost continual personnel changes of this and the following period easier to visualize, I have concocted the chart which appears on page 40.

Looking at the period 1970 to early 1972 – King Crimson II as we are calling it – at a distance of nearly two decades, this writer has rather violently mixed feelings about it. It didn't take Fripp long to figure out that somehow the music had lost its course. As early as 1973 he was talking about King Crimson II like this: "The time was spent preparing for the present, I suppose. This band [King Crimson III] is right for the present, just as the first band was right for its own time. The interim period was something I wouldn't want to undergo again." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* And in 1978 he admitted being "embarrassed" by KC II: "I went into catatonia for three weeks on a tour with that incarnation of the band. It was one of the most horrible periods of my life." *(Farber 1978, 27)*

Chart 4							
King Crimson I-III Personnel							
	GUITAR	LYRICS	REEDS, etc.	BASS/VOX	DRUMS		
KING CRIMSON I							
CCK British tour ‘69 American tour ‘69	Fripp	Sinfield	McDonald	Lake	M. Giles		
KING CRIMSON II							
						PIANO	BASS
only gig in 1970	Fripp	Sinfield		Lake	M. Giles	Tippet	P. Giles
Poseidon May ‘70	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Lake - Haskell	M. Giles	Tippet	P. Giles
Lizard Dec. ‘70	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Haskell	McCulloch		
Islands Dec. ‘71 British tour ‘71 America tour ‘71	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Boz	Wallace		
Earthbound American tour ‘72	Fripp		Collins	Boz	Wallace		
KING CRIMSON III							
						VIOLIN	PERCUSSION
British tour ‘72 *Larks’ Tongues* Feb. ’73	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford	Cross	Muir
European tour ‘73 American tour ‘73 *Starless* Feb. ‘74 More tours ‘74	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford	Cross	
Red July ‘74	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford		

During the period itself, with musicians entering and exiting the Court at a rapid pace, with ideas flying by, attempts being made to catch them, improvisational situations being tried out, albums being made, Fripp did his best to put the best face on it. In 1971 he said, "The beauty of the set-up in Crimson is that it can handle having a flexible personnel around a "core" of more or less permanent members" – the core, getting right down to it, being Fripp and Sinfield, and ultimately Fripp alone. *(Williams 1971, 24)* At the least, Fripp was able to indulge his perennial fascination with "the way musicians work together as a unit. You see, I view King Crimson as the microcosm of the macrocosm." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* By which one feels he meant that being in an evolving, complex, unpredictable, perilous yet potential-laden musical situation like King Crimson was verily analogous to being alive on planet Earth, or like being in some alchemical laboratory (the microcosm) for the purpose of investigating life itself (the macrocosm). Fripp would also issue elliptical, contradictory, unfathomable statements concerning his exact role in King Crimson. On the one hand, it was obvious by the end of 1972 that he was the only person who had been in all of the band's incarnations, that in some sense King Crimson was Robert Fripp plus whoever, that it was *his* band. Yet he seemed to shrink from assuming unambiguously the mantle of authority, which he felt belonged not to him but to King Crimson itself, the concept, the idea, the force, the music, not to one or several particular merely human personalities. In 1973 he would say things like, "I form bands, but I'm not a leader. There are far more subtle ways of influencing people and getting things done than being a band leader. Although I *can* be a band leader, it's not a function I cherish. Who needs it?" *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

In the Wake of Poseidon and *Lizard*

In January 1970, after the departure of McDonald and Giles, King Crimson was temporarily a trio consisting of Fripp, Lake, and Sinfield. (McDonald and Giles went on to make their self-titled duo album, released in 1971; McDonald was subsequently one of the founding members of Foreigner in 1976.) The trio cancelled future gigs and set about composing, rehearsing, and looking for new members to fill out the group, with vague plans to resume live performances. In order to sustain public interest in the band, King Crimson released the single "Cat Food / Groon" on March 13.

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CAT FOOD (by Fripp-Sinfield-McDonald). Well. I guess this is what Bartok would sound like if asked to write music for a Garfield movie – or Hendrix playing Disneyland – or something. On one level it's just a joke: Schizoid Man meets Felix the Cat at a Thelonious Monk concert: perhaps Fripp had to let it be known that there really was a jester dancing or at least lurking somewhere 'round the shadowy halls and dark pillars of the Court of the Crimson King. Because one wouldn't have known from the first album that anyone in the band had anything remotely approaching a sense of humor: the music embodied humorless dread and melancholy. So "Cat Food" – it may have been black humor, studied humor, sick humor, but it defied anyone to take it too seriously. Jazz pianist Keith Tippett, McDonald, and Fripp all have delightful moments of playing. Michael Giles (drums) and Peter Giles (bass) are the skittish rhythm section; Greg Lake sang it.

GROON (by Fripp) is a different sort of number entirely, performed solely by Giles, Giles, and Fripp on bass, drums, and guitar. This is more the kind of music Fripp would later become firmly identified with – "Groon" is almost a precursor of King Crimson III, moments on *Exposure*, even (to stretch it a bit) the League of Gentlemen. "Groon" is also a rather "pure"

specimen of jazz-rock – being a kind of latter-day electrified be-bop. Fast, frenetic guitar and drum work. Practically atonal. That peculiar quality of improvisational abandon simultaneous with strict planning and coordinated execution.

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King Crimson's only gig in 1970 was an appearance on BBC TV's "Top of the Pops" program on March 25, performing "Cat Food" with the lineup listed in the chart on page 40. By the end of the month Crimson had auditioned several drummers with the intent of finding a permanent replacement for Michael Giles but had succeeded only in enlisting the services of Circus's flute and reed player Mel Collins. In early April, bassist/vocalist Greg Lake decided to leave the Court and form a band with the Nice's Keith Emerson: this was, of course, the nucleus of the mighty Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. In the meantime, Fripp and the whole motley crew mentioned in the last couple of pages, in various combinations, had been busy recording *In the Wake of Poseidon*, King Crimson's second album, which was released in May.

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IN THE WAKE OF POSEIDON

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, & devices

• Greg Lake: vocals

• Michael Giles: drums

• Peter Giles: bass

• Keith Tippet: piano

• Mel Collins: saxes and flute

• Gordon Haskell: vocal on "Cadence and Cascade"

• Peter Sinfield: words

It was palpably evident that *Poseidon*'s musical models were those of *In the Court of the Crimson King.* With the exception of Side Two's "The Devil's Triangle," *Poseidon* didn't seem to break any new ground, although some critics saw it as a refinement over the first album. The overall form of *Poseidon*'s Side One almost exactly paralleled that of the first record: fierce blowout, soft ballad, mellotron epic – with the gentle vocal introduction of "Peace" here in place of the night-sounds-cum-prelude to "Schizoid Man." (In itself there's nothing the matter, of course, with using the same form more than once – in Beethoven's nine symphonies, thirty-two piano sonatas, sixteen string quartets, and many other pieces, the Viennese master almost invariably resorted to sonata form.)

The modal plea for "Peace" recurs as a guitar instrumental at the beginning of Side Two, and crops up with Greg Lake singing it once more at the very end. The recurring "Peace" theme serves to unify the album conceptually as well as musically – a nod to Bartok's multi-movement arch forms as well as to *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.* The problem is, it's very difficult to make a Beatles-type album (which, at some level, in some manner, Fripp was explicitly trying to do) without the melodic gift of a Paul McCartney, who, for all the petulant criticism foisted on him through the years, always brought to Lennon's existential sermons and rock'n'rootsy authenticity a kind of effortless grace and sheer joyful musicality. Fripp has never quite found his McCartney/counterpart, and hence has had to construct his music on Herculean

effort alone, pure force of will, mind over recalcitrant musical matter. (And no, I'm not saying King Crimson should have tried to sound more like the Beatles.)

Poseidon's expansive, fold-out cover featured a painting by Tammo de Jongh called "12 Archetypes" – trickster, anima, child, magician, and so on – and was perhaps an indication of an interest on Fripp's part in Jungian psychology (Carl Jung, like Fripp, was concerned with forging some fusion of magic and reason, intellect and intuition, inner and outer, art and science). As on the jacket of *In the Court of the Crimson King*, Sinfield's lyrics were printed in their entirety, though (at least on my copy) the silver ink and semi-glossy background made them onerously difficult to read.

Side One

PEACE-A BEGINNING (by Fripp and Sinfield). Medieval chant-like. Lake's voice grows out of deep reverb into clear focus until suddenly (let's hope you haven't turned up your stereo too high, the better to hear the delicate harmonics resound – how many times have I done that in soft King Crimson passages, only to be rudely, deeply, profoundly shocked and irritated) you are slammed over the head with ...

PICTURES OF A CITY including 42ND AT TREADMILL (by Fripp and Sinfield). Lurching jazz rock blues instrumental introduction/ritornello, two verses of urban/diabolical Sinfieldisms spat out by Lake, frenetic instrumental (Bartok plays the blues), a soft cozmik blues section, crescendo to final sung verse (final line "lost soul lost trace lost in hell," viz., the realm of Beelzebub, the Devil, a.k.a. King Crimson), final atonal freakout a la "Schizoid Man," leads directly without a break into ...

CADENCE AND CASCADE (by Fripp and Sinfield). Gentle acoustic guitar caresses in .. unambiguously ... *E Major*!! First King Crimson song really in major. Hence into the realm of light (but not for long). Tasteful flute embellishments by Mel Collins ...

IN THE WAKE OF POSEIDON including LIBRA'S THEME (by Fripp and Sinfield). Mellotron minor epic. Verse chord progression almost identical to counterpart on *CCK*, "Epitaph." Harlequins, queens, Mother Earth, bishops, hags, slaves, heroes, Magi, Plato, and Jesus Christ himself populate Sinfield's imaginary landscape. I don't know. The images are extremely evocative, but it does seem to me that you have to do more than *mention* all these figures – you have to *contend* with them. As it is, it seems a bit like name-dropping, redeemed if at all only by the weight and majesty of the music and by the frightening contemporary implication: "Whilst all around our mother earth – waits balanced on the scales." Also – I've gone back and forth about this so many times – the *sound*, the "production values," the overall impression ... well, Fripp and Sinfield self-produced this record (*CCK* was "Produced by King Crimson") ... and I'm not sure they fully brought out the potential grandeur of a song like "In the Wake of Poseidon." Something thin about it, not enough bottom, not enough reverberation. It's not as though I wanted King Crimson to sound like Pink Floyd or the Moody Blues, but you have to admit that a real production pro like Jimmy Page gave Led Zeppelin's records a *sound* that made Cream's records pale by comparison, even if Cream was arguably the more talented group. Very, very few bands have ever had the perspective, the knowledge, the ears, the experience, to produce themselves in the recording studio; it's not like it's a diminution of your musicianship to be produced by someone else – look at the Beatles with George Martin. (BUT ... *take* those late Beatle albums, and listen to what John Lennon had to say about them in December 1970: "But ... but they're always dead, you know. They'd gotten to that sort of dead Beatles sound, or dead recorded sound.") *(Lennon Remembers, 21)* Fripp was walking a tightrope: not wanting to *over*-produce, wanting to capture some of the spontaneity of a live performance; but simultaneously

wanting to present a perfected product on the par of *Revolver* or almost any of the mid-to-late Beatle albums. A lot of it, I am convinced, has to do with the bass player, the bass line, the kind of overall resonance that the bottom end brings to the music: McCartney almost always got it just right for the Beatles; Peter Giles and Greg Lake never had the exact touch necessary for what I would pompously call the "ideal" King Crimson sound – Fripp was to find that touch later, albeit with quite a different kind of music, with John Wetton, and still later with Tony Levin in the 1980s – but there is something about the bass in KC I and KC II that vitiates the primal energy and expansiveness of the music. BUT ... paradoxically (ever dealing in paradoxes when you deal with King Crimson), it is precisely that lack of a firmly, manly produced/dispatched bass on *Poseidon* that makes the album more listenable today, less dated-sounding, than so many other "progressive rock" artifacts of the period, ELP and Procol Harum being prime examples. It is as if Fripp was consciously or unconsciously stripping the production job down to a minimum, relying on music rather than sound, emphasizing structure over color, meaning over expression. One more thing: harmony. *Poseidon*'s title track is so conventional harmonically that it makes one doubt Fripp's expressed conviction about mingling Afro-American sound ideals with Western tonal/harmonic developments as exemplified in Bartok: once was enough, made the point ("Epitaph"); twice ("In the Wake of Poseidon") was too much; it was redundant from a harmonic point of view. Fripp was soon to break out of this harmonic straitjacket, however.

Side Two

PEACE-A THEME (by Fripp and Sinfield). For acoustic guitars, same germinal melodies as at beginning of Side One.

CAT FOOD (by Fripp, Sinfield, McDonald). Longer than single version (the jam stretches out at the end).

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE (by Fripp). "Bolero" rhythm – *in 5*. Fripp's penchant for odd meters like 5 and 7 begins here. In all, the four sections of "The Devil's Triangle" represent Fripp's most ambitious and adventurous composition to this point in his career. The most original, the most idiosyncratic, the strangest, the purest. And from a harmonic point of view, the most advanced, almost completely dispensing with the concept of conventional chord progressions in favor of an unpredictable yet fresh and interesting, if ominous and disturbing, series of dissonances. "The Devil's Triangle" relies on *musical ideas* rather than simply raw energy, athletic musicianship, or sound color.

Including:

MERDAY MORN (by Fripp and McDonald). More bolero, working toward a climax.

HAND OF SCEIRON (by Fripp). Windstorm.

GARDEN OF WORM (by Fripp). Metronome clicks. Bolero rhythm returns, faster, more intense. Leads into deranged circus music with overlapping metric planes. Works into a metric free noise section, lots of thrashing by all the players. Reminiscence of "In the Court of the Crimson King" filters into the chaos. Flute calls reverberate, lead into...

PEACE-AN END (by Fripp and Sinfield). Voice and guitar combined: how symmetrical, how elemental, how developmental. At the final end, Lake's voice goes back into reverb from whence, at the beginning of the album, it came. Strangely unresolved harmony.

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There's no rest for the wicked, or so the saying goes, and indeed no sooner was *Poseidon* in the can and released than Robert Fripp buckled down to work on King Crimson's next LP,

Lizard – the first Crimson album whose music was entirely written by Fripp (actually there has been only one other, the following *Islands*). The core lineup of the studio group remained Fripp, Sinfield, Collins, and Haskell (who took over full bass and vocal duties); Andy McCulloch, who like Haskell hailed from Fripp's part of the country, was added on drums, and various other musicians worked as sidemen. Fripp was by now referring to King Crimson as a "pool" of contributors, *(YPG, 9)* or as "a way of getting people together to play music and a way of thinking about things." *(YPG, 10)* Sinfield described Crimson as "a pyramid or cone with Bob Fripp and me sitting on the top. Underneath are various musicians and friends upon whom we can call, who form a very solid foundation." *(YPG, 10)* Rumors of possible touring circulated, but on the eve of *Lizard*'s release on December 11, 1970, Haskell and McCulloch quit the band, and Crimson was left *sans* bassist, vocalist, and drummer. Said Fripp: "I suppose Crimson is a way of life. It's a very intense thing and I think Gordon [Haskell] realized that." *(MM 1970B, 45)* During the latter stages of *Lizard*'s production Fripp was also rehearsing and performing with Keith Tippett's fifty-piece band, Centipede.

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LIZARD

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, electric keyboards and devices

• Mel Collins: flute and saxes

• Gordon Haskell: bass guitar and vocals

• Andy McCulloch: drums

• Peter Sinfield: words and pictures

with:

• Robin Miller: oboe and cor anglais

• Mark Charig: cornet

• Nick Evans: trombone

• Keith Tippet: piano and electric piano

• Jon Anderson of Yes: vocals on "Prince Rupert Awakes"

What kind of music "is" this, what genre, what type – what the hell are we actually listening to here? Are we supposed to draw any connecting lines between this music and Jim Morrison and the Doors ("Celebration of the Lizard," "I am the lizard king – I can do anything") ... lizard king, Crimson King, Morrison's book *The Lords and the New Creatures*, etc., ... between this music and Freud?

The multiplicity of levels evident in Beatles music continued to be an ideal that haunted Fripp in composing *Lizard*, even if he wasn't interested in copying the Beatles' style per se. "The only thing that worries me," he said, "is that perhaps it [*Lizard*] won't be given enough of a chance. We've made it so that the 24th time things'll really begin to go Zap. At the same time, when the album starts it should really hit you, so that you'll think perhaps there's something worth getting into." *(Williams 1971, 24)* The problem here – I said something like this already – is that the Beatles managed to make their music likeable and infectious and seductive and entrancing on the *first* hearing; by the twenty-fourth hearing you were into the subtleties, but you listened to it twenty-four times because you *wanted* to. Fewer listeners, it is probably safe to say,

were (or are today) willing to listen twenty-four times to an LP's worth of what is often, on "Lizard," an unfamiliar, unappealing, unattractive, high-strung, neurotic, almost perversely difficult sounding surface, in order to get to that magic place of cognizance where the zapping fun begins. And yet ... *does Lizard* begin to make sense after twenty-four hearings? I'm probably only up to about fifteen or twenty, but in my experience, the answer would have to be yes. It becomes a question, however, of how much you are going to demand of your listening audience, and in this matter Fripp tends to opt for a "no pain, no gain" approach. Jung had said, after all, "There is no birth of consciousness without pain," *(Jung MDR?)* and if so in life, then why should it be otherwise in art?

At this point, though, yet another meta-musical quandary rears its beguiling head. As Brian Eno once put it, "Almost any arbitrary collision of events listened to enough times comes to seem very meaningful. (There's an interesting and useful bit of information for a composer, I can tell you.)" *(Eno 1983, 56)* This morning, not thinking about writing this, not thinking about *Lizard*, not thinking about anything in particular, I woke up at about six. It was dark and stormy outside and I was unaccountably sucked over to my sequencer for some mysterious reason – I wanted to hear some tones. I punched in a few random diatonic notes, which repeated every ten seconds or so. My seven-year-old daughter Lilia, coming into the living room, was perplexed that there should be this ethereal music with no one playing the synthesizer. I showed her that the tape recorders weren't running, and told her it was ghosts. She didn't believe it. "There must be some trick," she said. So I showed her what the trick was, and she wanted to try it. She played the opening phrase of Handel's Christmas carol "Joy to the World," a descending octave scale, which proceeded to repeat in a loop. About five minutes later I stumbled over and punched in a few more tones, which turned out to be not the ones I wanted, but I let them stand. This "music" went on and on and on, through breakfast and watering the plants and the rest of it, and by half an hour later the sound had come to seem endowed with a shimmering depth of significance.

The sound of King Crimson grew yet more astringent and dissonant on *Lizard*, and rock critics, who generally agreed that if nothing else, this must be the work of a genius, began to be confused and put off. The issue was becoming one of, How much of that *kind* of genius do we need or *want* in rock and roll, roots music, the music of the people? *Lizard* lacked even a real git-down potboiler like "Schizoid Man", how far could the limits of rock be stretched without its preciously nasty essence being irretrievably lost?

Side One

CIRKUS including ENTRY OF THE CHAMELEONS; INDOOR GAMES; HAPPY FAMILY. Three nervous, sputtering fantasy songs (with remnants of the *Court of the Crimson King* mellotron epic on the first) led off the album. The textures were incredibly complex, the rhythms were skittish and jumpy, and the dissonances resulting from a seemingly random intersection of contrapuntal planes were grating. The whole effect owed as much to avant-garde jazz as to rock. Sinfield came up with some snarlingly suggestive imagery in "Indoor Games" ("Dusting plastic garlic plants / They snigger in the draught"), while "Happy Family" is a rollicking if intentionally awkward pain of a paean on the breakup of the Beatles (who also appear imaginatively portrayed in one of the many panels on the album's immaculately beautiful cover painting by Gini Barris, painstakingly executed in the style of medieval manuscript illuminations).

LADY OF THE DANCING WATERS. Fripp at his most lyrical – the vocal line is a bona fide *tune*, and really quite affecting, embellished by Collins' fluttering flute arabesques. Yes, beauty, sheer beauty, classical grace, romantic yearning, were part of the whole King Crimson formula, and here those qualities are given almost completely unambiguous, non-ironic

embodiment – Nick Evans' subtle trombone slides being the one stinger in an otherwise straightforward and sincere pastorale.

Side Two (the "Lizard" Suite proper)

PRINCE RUPERT AWAKES. Sinfield's diffuse and inscrutable lyrics are miraculously redeemed by Jon Anderson's highly polished, professional, and lovely vocal, and by another genuinely melodic strain from Fripp's imagination (in a way it was becoming a question of how long Fripp was going to continue to be constrained by Sinfield's precious, raucous, sometimes preciously raucous or raucously precious poetics). "Prince Rupert Awakes" contains the only instance I can call to mind of a minor chord with a major seventh in the rock repertory (maybe Stevie Wonder or Peter Gabriel threw one in somewhere). Leads without a break into ...

BOLERO-THE PEACOCK'S TALE. A structured improvisation which leads from bolero classical-style to bolero big-band style and back again, making effective contrasts between major and minor modes at climactic points of formal articulation.

THE BATTLE OF GLASS TEARS

Including

DAWN SONG. Vocal prelude setting up a medieval/mythological battle scene, which unfolds in ...

LAST SKIRMISH. Mellotrons, horns, flutes, bass, guitar, and drums clash and pulsate in pugilistic cacophony in one of Fripp's several musical Armageddons of the period.

PRINCE RUPERT'S LAMENT. This I presume is the section of ominously repeated bass notes over which Fripp engages in one of his patented (or soon to be patented) fuzz-sustained guitar workouts, sounding here somewhat like a rock and roll bagpipe.

BIG TOP. No, your record player's speed control isn't on the blink – that's Robert Fripp playing with his mellotron's pitch. This brief interlude (which turns out to be the album's coda) is one of many instances (refer back to *Lizard*'s opening track, "Cirkus," for example) of early Crimson probing the depths of that stock situation of B-movie or "Twilight Zone" fame: a happy family circus, nice on the surface but, as it develops, with something very WEIRD, very EVIL going on behind the scenes. A grand overreaching metaphor for the sterile-surface-covering-sadistic-subconscious-Western-society idea?

(I have assumed that Robert Fripp basically wrote *Lizard*'s music, and Peter Sinfield the words. In actual fact, of course, everyone who played on the record had some part in the music's creation, since so far as I know Fripp did not, Zappa-like, write out every last note and nuance of expression, but rather strove to elicit from given players the type of semi-improvised passages he deemed fitting for a given piece. Furthermore, Sinfield had a significant musical role as well, at least in theory: he was quoted as saying, "It's got to the stage where nothing on 'Lizard' was passed without my approval." Fripp described to me the making of *Lizard* as a "power struggle" between him and Sinfield. With the personal and creative relationship between them deteriorating, Fripp was finding it increasingly difficult to write music to Sinfield's words. This tension, which Fripp feels comes through much of the music on *Lizard*, would soon come to a head.) *(YPG 11, Jan. 2 1971)*

Islands and *Earthbound*

The period immediately after the release of *Lizard* was what Fripp has called "a time of desperation." *(YPG 11, Dec. 19 1970)* King Crimson was looking for bassists and singers, and considered Bryan Ferry, among many others. After Fripp had auditioned some thirty bass players, Boz Burrell was chosen in February 1971. Or rather, it appears that having been selected as King Crimson's singer, Boz (who was not a bassist) was one day noodling around on a bass and Fripp decided it would be possible to teach him to play the instrument, more or less from scratch. With the lineup of Fripp, Sinfield, Collins, Boz, and Ian Wallace (drums), King Crimson rehearsed through March and by April were ready to start performing, it had been almost a year and a half since the end of the American tour in December 1969, when King Crimson I broke up, and Fripp was nervous but exceeding eager.

After four April dates at the Zoom Club in Frankfurt, the band began a long and grueling tour schedule (1971 – Britain: May, fourteen gigs; June and July, two gigs; August, seven gigs; September, six gigs; October, eighteen gigs. Canada and U.S.A.: November, twelve gigs; December, six gigs. 1972 – U.S.A.: February, twelve gigs; March, nineteen gigs; April, one gig). The touring band drew on King Crimson's by now fairly substantial repertoire.

(Historical footnote on the pecking order among British progressive rock bands in late 1971: at two concerts at the Academy of Music in New York on November 24 and 25, Yes opened, King Crimson played second, and the headliner was Procol Harum. The *Variety* reviewer, who noted the undue time necessary for equipment changes between sets by the three quasi-symphonic behemoths, allowed that Procol Harum was "in fine form" but "was put to the test by having to follow strong sets by Yes and the overpowering King Crimson," who, he felt, "should headline next time out." When King Crimson returned to the Academy of Music on February 12, 1972, they were indeed the headliners – supported by Redbone and the Flying Burrito Brothers.)

In the meantime, work was in progress on the studio album *Islands*, which was completed by October and released on December 3, 1971, almost exactly a year after "Lizard." All of the album's six pieces were by Fripp or by Fripp and Sinfield. Fripp used the contributions of nine musicians to get the sound he wanted, but if King Crimson was a way of doing things, for *Islands* that way involved following Fripp's instructions to the letter. As drummer Wallace has testified, "Fripp was in one of his weird periods. You had to play everything the way he did it. There was no room to stretch out." *(Rosen 1983, 21)*

As for Sinfield's lyrics – well, let me let another writer carry out the execution. Don Heckman, reviewing *Islands* in *Stereo Review*: "What is there to say, after all, about lyrics that go 'Time's grey hand won't catch me while the sun shine down / Untie and unlatch me while the stars shine,' or 'Love's web is spun, cats prowl, mice run / Wreathe snatch-hand briars where owls know my eyes'? ... With Yeats and Thomas and Keats and Lord knows how many other superb English poets available to me, I bloody well don't intend to waste my time with absurdities like this." *(Heckman 1972, 101)*

One of the strangest "rock" albums ever released, *Islands* presents stark, unreasonable contrasts: the three excessively precious and poetic ballad-type songs "Formentera Lady," "The Letters," and "Islands" (all of which nevertheless continue to use highly imaginative textures); the fantastic raunchy profundity of the guitar showcase instrumental "Sailor's Tale"; the X-rated "Ladies of the Road"; the pure if not puerile classicism of "Prelude: Song of the Gulls"; and the

oceanic spaciousness of the title track, “Islands.” Of all of Fripp’s albums, this is probably the hardest to understand, the easiest to ridicule, the most difficult to be generous to. And yet ...

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ISLANDS

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, Peter’s Pedal Harmonium, and sundry implements

• Mel Collins: flute, bass flute, saxes, and vocals

• Boz: bass guitar, lead vocals, and choreography

• Ian Wallace: drums, percussion, and vocals

• Peter Sinfield: words, sounds, and visions

Featured players:

• Keith Tippet: piano

• Paulina Lucas: soprano

• Robin Miller: oboe

• Mark Charig: cornet

• Harry Miller: string bass

Side One

FORMANTERA LADY (by Fripp and Sinfield). Begins with bass solo, then flute, piano, and tinkling percussion enter. Boz delivers the first two verses of foursquare melody in deadpan foursquare style. (Why couldn’t Fripp ever hire singers who knew something about phrasing?) The minimalistic B section/refrain/long instrumental closeout is little more than a beat with flaccid soloing, spineless scatting by Boz and rustling clinking percussive noises in the background. Soprano Paulina Lucas comes in with some long-tone vocalizing. Debussy’s “Sirens” it ain’t; Lennon’s “Mother” it ain’t. But *Islands* has a bit of both. Lennon (with Phil Spector) had risked a minimalistic approach to production with *Plastic Ono Band*, released in late 1970. It’s tempting to see an influence on Fripp here. “Formantera Lady” leads directly into ...

SAILOR’S TALE (by Fripp). Ostinato. Some nice blowing by Mel Collins. Again the minor/major contrast. Then the beat slows and we get one of the tastiest guitar passages Fripp has ever committed to record. Faced with playing like this, one has to wonder why Fripp didn’t shut up his vocalists more and just play his guitar. Then the fast beat comes back, with mellotrons galore. The ending – guitar downshifting decellerando, leaving only low, long sounds: a nice compositional gesture.

THE LETTERS (by Fripp and Sinfield). This priceless artifact of mannered progressive rock seems to embody the dissolution of King Crimson II in a nutshell. Mr. Bangs to the witness stand: “‘The Letter’ [sic] is just an old-fashioned soap opera set to lumbering, churning vats of musical tar, with lyrics worth quoting if not much else: ‘With quill and silver knife / She carved a poison pen / Wrote to her lover’s wife / “Your husband’s seed has fed my flesh.”‘ And then the poor cuckoldette commits suicide. What is all this quasi-Victorian/Shakespearean doggerel, anyway? Are the British trying to get back to their roots? Irritating as I find it, the music is good.” *(Bangs 1972, 60)*

Side Two

LADIES OF THE ROAD (by Fripp and Sinfield). Obscene lyrics with music to match, but all in good fun. (In 1990 Fripp summed up his feelings about the lyrics of "Formantera Lady" to me: "What a load of crap." "Ladies of the Road," however, he endorsed: "That was *real*.") The critics loved this song because at least it had the sex (and plenty of it too) if not the drugs nor exactly the rock and roll. And it reminded listeners that Fripp and company did have a sense of humor, even if it didn't come out too often – and when it did was on the blue side.

PRELUDE: SONG OF THE GULLS (by Fripp). A Fripp exercise in unadorned "classical" music for strings and oboe. Bittersweet major key. Lovely in its way, it shows a different side of Fripp's background – but, to rephrase Don Heckman's tirade reported above, with Beethoven and Mozart and Bach and Lord knows how many other superb classical composers available to me, I'm not sure how much heavy analysis should be lavished on amateurish orchestrational efforts like this.

ISLANDS (by Fripp and Sinfield). Gorgeous melodic vocal writing. Long instrumental ending section over long harmonium tones; Fripp left in all the fluffed piano and cornet notes, a fact for which I admire him greatly, though I'm not exactly sure why – I suppose it's for having the courage to preserve the feeling of an interactive live performance.

The last thing we hear on *Islands*, after a lengthy silent interlude following the final song, is the chamber group used for "Prelude: Song of the Gulls" tuning up and the soft yet persuasive voice of Robert Fripp telling them they're going to do it twice more, once with the oboe and once without, then call it a day. He counts off the beat, one-two-three two-two-three, and ... silence: *Islands* is finished. I suppose you can read into this whatever you want, but to me it seems as if Fripp is telling us (the audience), Look, this is music, and music is made by people, and people have to tune up and practice and rehearse, and there is so much more behind music than the sound, more than ever can be told.

For all its impenetrability, its self-conscious artistic excess, its woefully labored attempts to capture innocence, there is a certain quality in *Islands* making the sum much greater than its parts, even if this sum does not quite tally up to musical greatness. The strange thing is, I listened to the album today for the first time in a couple of years, and I found, almost against my will (since I've been telling people for some time that *Islands* is the absolute worst King Crimson record ever put out) – I found that I actually *liked* it. As an overall musical gesture. The whole album has that sort of *fin-de-siecle* manneristic feeling, like the over-refined music of the late fourteenth century, the twilight of the middle ages – a sense of worlds falling apart, new ones as yet unborn, grand heartbreaking nostalgia for what can no longer be, rough beasts slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.

In the composition of *Islands*, Fripp was learning to subtract, to take things away, to let the black backdrop of silence show through the music, to heed the oft-repeated but ill-practiced axiom that less is more. To borrow a phrase from Eno (who in turn derived it from filmmaker Luis Bunuel): "Every note obscures another." *(Grant 1982, 29)*

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As had King Crimson's American tour in late 1969, their American tour in November and December of 1971 produced many moments of tension and even hostility among the band's members. Sinfield – who on tour played VCS3 synthesizer and worked the group's lighting and sound – in particular found the turmoil and pressures of being on the road in America difficult to cope with, and made up his mind that he wouldn't return to the States again with the band "unless

specific conditions were fulfilled, and I didn't expect them to be." *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* It wasn't long before Sinfield and Fripp had reached a point where it became clear that they were moving in irreconcilably different directions. On New Year's Day 1972, the *New Musical Express (YPG 17)* reported that Sinfield had left King Crimson, and a week later Fripp explained his view on the matter: "I suppose that the thing to say is that I felt the creative relationship between us had finished. I'd ceased to believe in Pete ... It got to the point where I didn't feel that by working together we'd improve on anything we'd already done." *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* As usual with Fripp, his dealings with the outer world were intimately bound up with his inner development. Eight years after the split with Sinfield, Fripp explained to an interviewer that he came to the decision to make the break on the same day he changed the name he was known by from "Bob" to "Robert": "I felt I'd made my first adult decision." *(Watts 1980, 22)*

Sinfield had had increasing difficulties dealing with his position in King Crimson, especially on tour. Fripp said that "the band often found the lights distracting", *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* he himself had grown suspicious of the visual "trickery" associated with the British tour of 1971, "however fine it may have been. I'm thinking of the lights, and the general blood and thunder." *(YPG 18-19, quoting MM, Jan. 15 1972)* In other words, Fripp wanted the band to be judged on its purely musical merits – again the suspicion of the "show biz" aspect of rock and roll performance. For his part, Sinfield, who had nevertheless expressed a desire to let his work grow in directions other than those offered by the King Crimson format, regarded the decision for him to quit the group as "entirely on Bob's side": "Bob rang me up and said 'I can't work with you.'" *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* Fripp was at pains to present the split to the British press in the most rancorless possible terms, and was disturbed by the sensationalist manner in which the *New Music Express* handled it. *(YPG 18, Jan. 8 1972)* The many instances of press distortion involving King Crimson constituted one reason why, later in the 1970s, Fripp would undertake a one-man campaign to reject and re-write the ground rules of the whole music industry complex.

In the opening months of 1972 the remaining members of King Crimson – Fripp, Collins, Boz, and Wallace – were not exactly congealing into what one would describe as a happy family. Yet, as reports of inner dissent came out in the press, the band was booked for one more American tour. As Fripp was later to write, the "Earthbound" tour "was conducted in the knowledge that the group would disband afterwards." *(Fripp 1980F, 38)*

While in America on KC II's final tour (February-April 1972), drummer Ian Wallace bought a portable Ampex stereo cassette deck which the group plugged into the mixing board during live performances. Many performances were taped this way, and Fripp subsequently took the cassettes home and edited them down to a live album, *Earthbound*, released in England on June 9, 1972. Crimson's American distributor, Atlantic, declined to put out the record, saying the sound quality wasn't good enough. (My copy is a later Italian version on the Philips/Polydor label, featuring liner notes by a certain Daniele Caroli titled "Robert Fripp: musica psichedelica dal vivo negli USA" ["live psychedelic music in the USA"] and incongruously sporting a cover collage utilizing the photos from King Crimson's 1974 album *Red*: Fripp, John Wetton, and Bill Bruford., Sound quality or no sound quality, *Earthbound* is an unusual cultural document, the sole officially released record of KC II live, music somehow emerging from the wreckage of a dream.

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EARTHBOUND

• Fripp: guitar, mellotron, synthesizer

• Boz Burrell: bass and vocals

• Mel Collins: saxes and flutes, mellotron

• Ian Wallace: drums and percussion

21ST CENTURY SCHIZOID MAN. The group romps ably through a version of the old war-horse that clocks in at eleven minutes and forty-five seconds. Fripp delivers an insane monster of a distorted guitar solo over Boz and Wallace's spirited thumping, then cuts out to let Collins' sax have a go. Delirious abandon, even – dare I say it – joy.

PEORIA (by Fripp, Collins, Burrell, and Wallace). Ah yes, the old two-chord (I-IV) jam. I think you had to be there. Collins is cooking, though – recipe drawn from the post-Coltrane sheets-of-sound cookbook. Then who's that scat-singing? Must be Boz, how about a B minus for effort and go back and study your Louis Armstrong records ... a lot. Fripp gets in a few tasty rhythm licks before the fade-out.

THE SAILOR'S TALE. Ably dispatched.

EARTHBOUND (Fripp, Collins, Burrell, and Wallace). The old one-chord (I) jam. More scatting. Maybe I was unkind with the Louis Armstrong bit; Boz is clearly more comfortable – and compelling – with this kind of hollering than he was running through Sinfield's poetics *sotto voce* in the studio. In a couple of years Boz would be playing riffy blues rock in Bad Company, and that direction is all too evident in takes like this. Fripp turns in what is, by now, one of his patented angular, dissonant electric guitar solos.

GROON. The group negotiates its way through a highly extended version of "Cat Food"'s B side, a composition which, when you think about it, is no piece of cake. Here the song serves as a vehicle for some ecstatic wailing and shrieking by saxman Collins, with Fripp comping along in the middleground. There's a moment when the music dies down a bit and you can hear ... *somebody just screaming their head off.* The second half of "Groon"'s fifteen-plus minutes' duration is devoted to a roiling drum solo by Wallace, the latter part of which is fed through a VCS3 synthesizer to produce all manner of sonic swoops, phases, and filtered friezes in motion. At the time (1972) this procedure was something of an innovation, at least in rock; and today, after two decades during which synthesizers have come to epitomize all that is sterile and lifeless in pop music, it's refreshing to hear a vintage machine being employed with such Dionysian glee.

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The contrast between *Islands* and *Earthbound* is extreme to a degree, a bit like mentioning Judy Collins and Patti Smith in the same breath. The split between studio Crimson and live Crimson had grown virtually to the point of schizophrenia: there was Fripp the painfully self-conscious composer of delicate neo-romantic refinements, refined almost to a point of transparently pellucid non-entity; and there was Fripp the jagged metal warrior, brazenly brandishing his electric guitar as a weapon, band of sonic renegade vagabonds in tow. Great musicians often have some such split musical personality – Beethoven can pat you lovingly on the cheek one minute, and wheel you around and kick you in the butt the next.

King Crimson II: a period of intensive searching by Robert Fripp, who managed, in trying circumstances, some of which were surely of his own (if unconscious) making – to put out four

albums of some of the most experimental, eclectic, interesting, difficult, challenging, beautiful, ugly, and at times profoundly irritating music ever to come out of the rock orbit.

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Chapter Six: King Crimson III and Brian Eno

Traditionally aggression is symbolized by the sky and earth radiating red fire ... In the hell realm we throw out flames and radiations which are continually coming back to us. There is no room at all in which to experience any spaciousness or openness.

– Chogyam Trungpa

The Formation of King Crimson III

King Crimson II disbanded after the "Earthbound" tour, whose last gig was in Birmingham, Alabama, on April 1, 1972. Fripp was looking for something new. In November he was to say of the *Earthbound* period, "Having discovered what everybody [in the band] wanted to do, I found I didn't want to do it." *(YPG 21, quoting from* Sounds, *Nov. 4 1972)* On the following page is a condensed chronology of activities taking us from this point to the end of the King Crimson III period.

Chart 5	
Condensed Chronology of King Crimson III	
1972	
July 22:	New KC lineup announced: Fripp, Bruford, Wetton, Cross, Muir
Sept. 4:	KC III rehearsals begin
Sept. 8:	"The Heavenly Music Corp." recorded by Fripp and Eno at Eno's London home studio
Oct. 13 - Dec. 15:	KC III British tour (beginning in Germany)
1973	
Jan. - Feb.:	*Larks' Tongues in Aspic* recorded at Command Studios, London
Feb. 10:	Muir injures himself onstage and leaves King Crimson
Feb. 10 - Apr. 9:	British and European tours
Apr. 18 - July 2:	American tour
Aug. 4-5:	"Swastika Girls" recorded with Eno at Command Studios, London
Sept. 19 - Nov. 29:	American, European tours
1974	
Jan.:	*Starless and Bible Black* produced at AIR Studios, London
Mar. 19 - July 1:	European, American tours
June:	*U.S.A.* recorded live in New York City by the Record Plant
July - Aug.:	*Red* produced at Olympic Sound Studios, London, by Fripp, Bruford, and Wetton
Sept. 28:	Breakup of King Crimson III announced
1975	
Sept.:	Fripp compiles *Young Persons' Guide to King Crimson*, London

Immediately following the Earthbound tour, in May 1972, Fripp set about forming a new King Crimson. This time, you can practically hear the man muttering under his breath, it's no more Mr. Nice Guy. In point of fact, Fripp was determined to make a break from the chaos and instability of KC II as well as from some of the musical styles of that "interim" period, to get back somehow to the intangible spirit of King Crimson that was continuing to haunt him like a demon. Perhaps as a symbol of the changes to be made, Fripp cut his long frizzy hair around this time and sprouted a neat little beard – changing his visual appearance from latter-day hippie to fastidiously groomed young intellectual musician.

A man like Fripp does not believe that things happen by accident, but rather looks for synchronistically significant signs, reading the screen of his perceptions as a metaphorical psychic tableau. In the late spring of 1972 a number of such signs seemed to present themselves in an auspicious constellation, and Fripp's confidence was high.

To begin with, there was the matter of enlisting the talents of experimental percussionist and notorious mystical crazy man Jamie Muir, whose list of avant-garde credits included work with saxophonist Evan Parker, guitarist Derek Bailey, the Battered Ornaments and Boris. Muir's name had been crossing the screen of Fripp's awareness for several years. Fripp had felt it inevitable that some day they would work together. He told an interviewer in 1973, "When I finally phoned him up, we talked as if we'd known each other for a long time. He expected to be in King Crimson and had been waiting for my call." *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

Then there was the matter of bassist/singer John Wetton, who, like Muir, had been on Fripp's mind for some time. Wetton was, like Fripp, Greg Lake, and several other musicians in the King Crimson circle, from the Bournemouth area – Fripp and Wetton had known each other in college – and had worked his way up in local bands before joining the eclectic progressive rock group Family in 1970. Wetton left Family to briefly join Mogul Thrash, and when that band fell apart in early 1971, Wetton, looking for work, called Fripp up in late January, a week after Fripp had concluded his torturous and lengthy auditioning of bass players by choosing Boz. By October 1971, Fripp had a proposition for King Crimson II members Collins, Boz, and Wallace, as well as for Wetton: Wetton would join the band, freeing Boz to concentrate more on his vocal duties. The band members rejected the idea; they wanted Boz to continue on bass. For his part, Wetton declined; he later said, "I didn't think I'd get on with that band at all. Fripp was just using me then as an ally. Saying 'Listen, I'm outnumbered; there are three people who want to play this kind of music and only me who wants to play *this* kind of music. Help.' I didn't think that was a very good pretext for joining the band so I said no." *(Rosen 1983, 22)* Score one for Wetton's strength and independence; so far so bad for Fripp's designs on Wetton's talents. But when KC II finally came apart, the time was ripe: what had been out of sync now fell together, and Fripp and Wetton finally seemed to need each other at the same time. Wetton later said the idea was to rebuild the band from the ground up: "We totally re-designed the band, we updated it. I felt that the band before ours, the *Islands* band, was a little dated. They were trying to play pseudo kind of pop funk and it just didn't gel. So we put it back on the rails again and headed it in a progressive direction with *Larks' Tongues in Aspic*." *(Rosen 1983, 22)* Wetton, who after KC III was to play with Uriah Heep and Asia, had a vigorous, muscular touch with the bass and was known for his habit of breaking strings.

Then there was the business of Yes drummer Bill Bruford, who had also been filtering in and out of Fripp's line of vision ever since March 1970, when Yes had asked Fripp to join the band to replace guitarist Peter Banks. Fripp had declined, intent on pursuing his musical goals within the framework of King Crimson (even though King Crimson at that point in time was rather in disarray). From then to the spring of 1972, Yes went on to do what many, myself

included, feel was their best work, culminating in the epic rock sonata "Close to the Edge." Around May or June 1972, Fripp, guitar and amplifier in tow, joined Bruford for dinner at the latter's house one evening. After the repast they played a bit of music together at Fripp's suggestion, and before you could say "incredible drummer – obvious choice," Bruford had accepted a post in King Crimson.

Thus was born a musical collaboration which in a sense endured for over a decade, since Bruford was back when King Crimson was born again, mark IV, in the 1980s. Perhaps more than most of the musicians who have played in King Crimson, Bruford bought into the Frippian philosophy ever hovering somewhere amid the shadowy columns of the Court – a philosophy for which Fripp, of course, refused to take direct credit (or in a sense responsibility), preferring to reserve that honor for the mythical entity of "King Crimson" itself. When KC IV broke out in 1981, for instance, Bruford, simultaneously endorsing and distancing himself from the philosophy, would say that despite the endless personnel changes over the years, "basically this thing, King Crimson, continues, because there was a spirit about it and an attractive way of thinking about music, some ground rules, which continue. Robert will talk endlessly about icons and things, but to us plain Englishmen it just seems a very good idea for a group and we've re-harnessed this, we've kind of gone back into it." *(Dallas 1981, 27)*

There were those in the music press who wondered aloud why Bruford would choose to quit Yes, a group that precisely then was sitting on top of the pinnacle of commercial and artistic success, to join King Crimson, a somewhat suspect band, not quite on the same rank from a sales viewpoint – a band which had by this time become almost a joke in terms of its perpetual instability and volatility, and whose music was perceived as uneven, risky, and of dubious commercial value. But for his part, Bruford felt he had learned all he could musically from the Yes lineup; an artistic adventure with Fripp and company held out potentially greater personal rewards than continuing to beat time for one of progressive rock's unquestioned supergroups. He was also eager to work with percussionist Muir, who appeared to Bruford as a direct link with "the world of free jazz and inspiration," as he put it. *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

Fripp, as part of his overall effort to banish immediate musical memories and habits, to rejuvenate his imagination, decided against using a reed player, saxophone had been a big part of the whole King Crimson sound right from the beginning, one reason why the group was so strongly associated with jazz-rock. Fripp instead opted for a violin and viola player who could complement his own melodic guitar work with a new range of tone color, and who could also double on mellotron and other keyboards in certain situations. That player was David Cross, a musician with a classical background who had floated around the music scene and had worked with a pop-rock singer named P.J. Proby and folk-rock band the Ring. Cross described his recruitment casually: "Yeah, Robert came down and we got it together and had a couple of blows." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)* Like Bruford, Cross found the prospect, and then the reality, of working with percussionist Muir exciting; in 1973, he was to say, "We all learned an incredible amount from Jamie. He really was a catalyst of this band in the beginning and he opened up new areas for Bill to look into as well as affecting the rest of us." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)*

By July 1972 King Crimson III – Fripp, Muir, Wetton, Bruford, and Cross – was complete. Rehearsals commenced on September 4.

The following year, Fripp would tell *Rolling Stone* writer Cameron Crowe: "I'm not really interested in music; music is just a means of creating a magical state ... One employs magic every day. Every thought is a magical act. You don't sit down and work spells and all that hokey stuff. It's simply experimentation with different states of consciousness and mind control." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* This from a man who had made (and to this day still makes) a deliberate

practice, even a personal crusade, of not using drugs – from a musician some have perceived as the world's most rational rock star.

Robert Fripp viewed King Crimson as something outside himself, an entity, a being, a presence, which he could respond to, whose instrument he could become, but which was somehow intrinsically beyond him, not of his own creation, and over which, in spite of his dogged efforts to serve, he could ultimately exercise no real control. Fripp could say King Crimson was "too important to let die," and devote the better part of his life energy to keeping it alive, but in the final analysis he acknowledged it had a life and will of its own. Struggling mightily with this force, a force perceived to be *other*, outside the realm of the personal ego, making journeys into the realm of the magical, the unknown, the unconscious, Fripp repeatedly persevered and brought back fragments of the world lying below or beyond everyday awareness. King Crimson, a name coined to stand for Beelzebub, the devil, prince of demons, was a power that Fripp felt called to contend with.

Fripp was, in the latter half of the 1980s, to formulate and officially promulgate the image of a more benevolent presence to whose call he had responded: he would call it simply "music." But in mid-1972, music's alter ego, or shadow, or compellingly seductive twin, or bastard offspring, or fallen angel, still commanded the twenty-six-year-old Fripp's imagination: he called it "King Crimson."

Fripp and Eno

Throughout his tenure with King Crimson in the 1970s, Fripp found time to do session work with other musicians. He guested on Van der Graaf Generator's *H to He Who Am the Only One* (1970) and *Pawn Hearts* (1971), as well as on Peter Hammill's solo 1972 album *Fool's Mate*. As a producer, Fripp's credits included Centipede's *Septober Energy* (1971), Matching Mole's *Little Red Record* (1972), and Keith Tippett's *Blueprint* (1971) and *Ovary Lodge* (1972). Fripp met many musicians in his travels; one planned collaboration that didn't pan out was to have been an album with former Procol Harum guitarist Robin Trower, a project Fripp mentioned in a 1974 interview. *(Dove 1974, 14)*

One evening in September 1972, around the same time as KC III was commencing rehearsals, Brian Eno invited Fripp over to his home studio and showed him a system of producing music by using two tape recorders set up so that when a single sound was played, it was heard several seconds later at a lower volume level, then again several seconds later at a still lower level, and so on. The system permitted adjustments of various kinds, having to do with volume levels and length of delay; further, the live signal could be disconnected from the loop, so that the already-recorded sounds would repeat indefinitely while a live "solo" line could be played over the top. With this simple set-up, the two musicians set gleefully to work, and within forty-five minutes had produced a long (20'53") piece they called "The Heavenly Music Corporation," which was to become Side One of their *No Pussyfooting* album, released the following year.

Fripp had the highest respect for Eno, in spite of the fact that the latter's instrumental skills were minimal. Fripp said in 1979, "Eno is one of the very few musicians I've worked with who actually listens to what he's doing. He's my favorite synthesizer player because instead of using his fingers he uses his ears." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

With its drony opening, its rhapsodic modal guitar melodizing, its hypnotically returning cycles of phrases, and its sheer duration, "The Heavenly Music Corporation" could be called a

classic mixture of raga, minimalism, and rock, were it not for the fact that Fripp wasn't using Indian scales in any systematic way, nor had he yet had much exposure to the American minimalists. A guitarist's and technician's *tour de force*, the piece rewards close listening with its slow changes of color, emphasis, and tonality. For once, Fripp did shut out all distractions, remove all superfluous musical elements, and just play his guitar.

No Pussyfooting was a major point of departure for both musicians, and Fripp seemed to recognize it instantly as such. So much did Fripp like "The Heavenly Music Corporation" that when King Crimson went on the road in the fall of 1972, he would play the tape before the band came onstage and after they left. Fripp and Eno would continue to collaborate throughout the 1970s: 1975 saw the release of their joint ambient album *Evening Star*, Fripp's first major release following the demise of King Crimson III, and Fripp guested on Eno's solo albums *Here Come the Warm Jets* (1973), *Another Green World* (1975), *Before and After Science* (1977), and *Music for Films* (1978). A number of brilliantly inspired Fripp guitar solos are stashed away in these albums, notably on the songs "Baby's On Fire" (*Here Come the Warm Jets*) and "St Elmo's Fire" (*Another Green World*).

The "Larks' Tongues" Period

With scarcely a month of rehearsals behind them, King Crimson III played four gigs in October at Frankfurt's Zoom Club, followed by one at the Redcar Jazz Club. Between November 10 and December 15 they toured Britain, playing twenty-seven gigs. There was a renewed emphasis on improvisation in live performance in King Crimson's music of this period – but not the kind of improvisation common in jazz and rock, where one soloist at a time takes center stage and riffs and rhapsodizes, running through his chops while the rest of the band lays back and comps along with set rhythm and chord changes. In its best moments, King Crimson improvisation during this period was a group affair, a kind of music-making process in which every member of the band was capable of making creative contributions at every moment. Mindless individual soloing was frowned upon; rather, everyone had to be *listening* to everyone else at every moment, to be able to react intelligently and creatively to the group sound. This was a period when Fripp stressed the "magic" metaphor time and again; for to him, when group improvisation of this sort really clicked, it was nothing short of bona fide white magic.

Violinist/keyboardist David Cross described the process this way: "We're so different from each other that one night someone in the band will play something that the rest of us have never heard before and you just have to listen for a second. Then you react to his statement, usually in a different way than they would expect. It's the improvisation that makes the group amazing for me. You know, taking chances. There is no format really in which we fall into. We discover things while improvising and if they're really basically good ideas we try and work them in as new numbers, all the while keeping the improvisation thing alive and continually expanding." *(Corbett 1973)* Bruford stressed the group participation in improvisation, using the image of "a kind of fantastic musical sparring match." *(YPG 22, Sounds, Nov. 18 1972)*

Other than in the memories of those who went to King Crimson concerts in the *Larks' Tongues* period, in the published reviews, and in bootleg tapes of the music, there is no record of what was by most accounts a musical phenomenon that had to be experienced to be believed. Bill Bruford, for one, was surprised by the positive reaction to the group's playing: "After all, we walk on stage and play an hour and a quarter of music which isn't on record and they haven't heard before, often with no tonal or rhythmic centre." *(YPG 23, MM, Dec. 2 1972)*

Following the first KC III British tour (which concluded on December 15), in January and February of 1973 King Crimson went into Command Studios in London to make the album that would become known as *Larks' Tongues in Aspic.* It was Muir who came up with the title. When the group was playing back a tape of an instrumental piece they had just made, Muir was asked what it reminded him of; he said without hesitation, "Why, larks' tongues in aspic, what else?" *(Crowe 1973, 22)* (Aspic is defined as a jelly used to garnish or make a mold of meat or vegetables, or a lavender yielding a volatile oil. Take your pick.) The degree to which the music of *Larks' Tongues* reflects King Crimson's live playing of the period is open to debate, yet it seems that the two collectively-composed instrumental pieces, "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part One," and "The Talking Drum," contain, even in their studio versions, significant elements of group improvisation. The other instrumental, "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part Two," is listed as a Fripp composition, and the remaining three pieces are more or less carefully worked-out songs with lyrics by Richard Palmer-James. However well *Larks' Tongues* represents or does not represent the live Crimson sound, though, at least the album was made in what Fripp considered to be the proper organic sequence: *first* you go out and make live music and get the audience's feedback, *then* you go into a studio to record the music you have created in a live situation – rather than first composing and recording an album in sterile conditions and then going on the road to "promote" it.

Furthermore, with *Larks' Tongues* King Crimson was decisively back in a situation of collective authorship; the music of the previous two studio albums, *Islands* and *Lizard*, had been entirely by Fripp (even the composition of *Poseidon* had been mostly Fripp's affair). Cross put it this way: "We all did contribute equally to the 'Larks' Tongues in Aspic' album, although Robert was definitely the unifying force behind it." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)* The album's cover sported a symbolic tantric design of the moon and sun embedded in each other – a union of masculine and feminine principles.

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LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC

• David Cross: violin, viola, mellotron

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron and devices

• John Wetton: bass and vocals

• Bill Bruford: drums

• Jamie Muir: percussion and allsorts

Side One

LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC, PART ONE (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Muir). Opens with Muir rapidly stroking a thumb piano. Bells/cymbals and a high flute enter. Crescendo of cymbal trill, descrescendo of thumb piano. Repeated notes on violin; fuzz guitar careens through diminished harmonic areas; Bruford warms up on drums, then whole band slams in. Shall I go on? In essence, what follows is an impressive and somewhat scarifying display of group togetherness, in a number of sections set off by contrasting instrumentation, textures, harmonic premises, dynamics, and mood. Conflict and contrast continue to be dominant issues in King Crimson music, in this piece there is everything from solo fiddle to crashing fusion band and quasi-oriental unison lines. (I don't believe it – I just played the whole thing at 45 RPM while writing this – daughter Lilia was playing speeded-up *Switched-on Bach* this morning, as is her wont. So it *wasn't* just that cup of dark French roast – I *thought* "Larks' Tongues, Part I" was

longer than that. Actually sounded pretty good, though – the structure was more evident than I've ever heard it before.)

BOOK OF SATURDAY (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). An evocative, melancholy minor ballad. Not like earlier Crimson ballads however: more energy, movement, pluck, and a few little twisty harmonic and rhythmic complications to take it out of the 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 phraseology that dragged down some earlier songs.

EXILES (by Cross, Fripp, and Palmer-James). Strange burblings and percussives lead into another moody song, sung verses alternating with freer pulseless sections. The sung bridge contains some remarkable (for rock) modulations – Wetton taking a tip or two from the Brahms/Procol Harum harmonic cookbook. One thing one notices is how Bruford is able, and here willing, to keep himself out of the way more than previous KC drummers – more the Ringo Starr school of percussion, which in a song like "Exiles" is entirely appropriate.

Side Two

EASY MONEY (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Funny thing, having the accompaniment in 4 and the vocal in 7. Makes you feel like there's a fifth wheel on the cart somewhere. But clearly, metrical complications do not in themselves music make. In spite of valiant "funny sounds" efforts by Muir, the long instrumental portions never really take off.

THE TALKING DRUM (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Muir). Sound effects move to tritone bass ostinato over softly percolating percussion and drums, Cross and Fripp come in with modal soloing (and a funny mode indeed it be) tonic of A, scale A-B*b*-C-C#-D#-E-F-G#, with other notes from time to time), gradual crescendo, suddenly broken off *molto appassionato* by horrific squeals, which launch directly into ...

LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC, PART TWO (by Fripp). On the one hand, an intellectual metrical exercise (O.K. fellows, can you count this?) and an arcane study in whole-tone, tritone, and other exotic chord root relationships, and on the other hand a stingingly original and strangely rousing piece of instrumental rock and roll. Yeah, you can say that the rhythmic organization is "studied," "labored," "unnatural," and so forth. But for Fripp music like this offers the opportunity for players and audiences to concentrate, to concentrate in that peculiar way only difficult music can make us. Try playing it at 45 (turning up the bass to compensate for lost low frequencies) – I just did (intentionally this time), and it sounds much more "musical."

Dynamic contrast is of the essence in the music of *Larks' Tongues.* There *is* a psychological difference between loud and soft, after all, and in an age when compressors and limiters have squashed the dynamic range of recorded popular music down to the point where a delicately plucked acoustic guitar note or sensitively crooned vocal phrase comes out of your speakers at the same actual volume level as the whole damned synthesized band when it's blowing away at top intensity, listening to *Larks' Tongues'* startling contrasts of dynamics is a tonic for the ears. It's more real, it's more true. Y'know what I mean?

The "Starless" Period

King Crimson played two gigs at London's Marquee on February 10 and 11, 1973 – dates booked, according to Bruford, for "pure enjoyment and relaxation" to take some of the pressure off the band during the period of the intense *Larks' Tongues* recording sessions. *(Crowe 1973, 22)* At the first gig, Muir dropped a gong on his foot, causing an injury of sufficient seriousness to prevent him from playing the following night. Bruford, who viewed Muir's presence as

fundamental to King Crimson, assumed that they would have to cancel the gig, but the other members convinced him that they should carry on as a quartet. (Although Muir occasionally sat down behind a trap set to augment Bruford's drumming, his primary role seems to have been to provide dynamism with his animated stage presence and to gloss the music with an assortment of unusual sounds from a wide variety of percussion instruments, chimes, bells, mbiras, a musical saw, shakers, rattles, and miscellaneous drums.)

King Crimson, minus Muir, went ahead and did the Marquee date, and shortly thereafter Muir left the group permanently, to pursue other – shall we say perhaps related – interests: he became a monk in a monastery in Scotland.

When the recording of *Larks' Tongues* was finished, King Crimson – Fripp, Bruford, Wetton, and Cross – embarked on an extensive series of tours: Britain (nine gigs, March 16 - 25); Europe (nine gigs, March 30 - April 9); America (forty-four gigs, April 18 - July 2). Back in London, Fripp took time out from King Crimson to record "Swastika Girls" (Side Two of *No Pussyfooting*) with Eno at Command Studios on August 4 and 5. King Crimson rehearsals in August laid the foundations of four new pieces, "Lament," "The Night Watch," "The Great Deceiver," and "Fracture," all of which were to appear on the 1974 album *Starless and Bible Black.*

Soon Crimson was back on the road again, with tours of America (nineteen gigs, September 19 - October 15), Britain (six gigs, October 23 - 29), and Europe (eighteen gigs, November 2 - 29). The live band continued to astound audiences and critics with their virtuosity, the scope and power of their music, and their unique outlook. Fripp, King Crimson's acknowledged leader, puzzled many and delighted others with his inscrutable attitude and onstage banter. He reportedly told a Milwaukee audience on September 28, "We're not to be enjoyed – we're an intellectual band." (Commenting on this remark and the sarcastic reaction it elicited from a Milwaukee critic, Fripp wrote in the *Young Persons' Guide to King Crimson*, "We were surprised that so many people took everything we did so seriously.") *(YPG 27-28, Milwaukee Sentinel, Sept. 29 1973)* The funny thing about Fripp, though, was that he could be so funny when he was *on* and when the audience was tuned into his peculiarly pontifical sense of humor. At the April 28 concert at New York's Academy of Music, for instance, a *Variety* writer reported that Fripp delivered "a short comic rap plugging their new album" (*Larks' Tongues*) that was "uproarious." *(Kirb 1973A, 245)* When King Crimson returned to the Academy of Music on September 22, things weren't so jolly: a breakdown in their complicated sound system caused a delay of more than two hours as a new system was hastily procured and set up. *(Kirb 1973B, 272)*

The exhaustion of touring, the technical problems, the surreal conditions of road life, the ever-questionable band-audience relationship, and the problematic nature of making music under such circumstances were beginning to take their toll on Fripp. It was a pair of gigs at Italian sports arenas on November 12 and 13 that he was later to call the "turning point" for him in terms of his ability to "put up with the nonsense" that goes along with putting on a rock show. In one of his 1981 articles for *Musician, Player, and Listener* Fripp described the Felliniesque insanity that surrounded those two days in Turin and Rome: Maoists protesting for free admittance to the first show and crashing through a glass wall; Cross and Bruford getting drunk at an expensive dinner, throwing open wine bottles through the air and insulting the promoter's homosexual partner; concert ticket collectors stuffing their own pockets with cash receipts; backstage machine-gun-toting security police; a stoned hippie who in full view of the audience was beat bloody by the promoter's gun-carrying right-hand man for wandering onstage; and a desperate attempt at an encore almost scotched because members of the audience had pulled out the power cables. Fripp's account of the whole fiasco is a miniature classic of rock tragicomedy, but the moral for

us here is that the Italian gigs were the real beginning of the end for King Crimson. As Fripp concludes his story, "A few months later King Crimson 'ceased to exist' and I began to talk a lot about small, mobile and intelligent units." *(Fripp 1981B, 48)*

The frantic tours of 1973 concluded, King Crimson retired to London's AIR Studios in January 1974 to produce their next album, *Starless and Bible Black.* (The title is a phrase borrowed from Dylan Thomas. By way of injecting some levity into a band situation that tended toward gravity, Bruford was fond of renaming Crimson albums; this one he called "Braless and Slightly Slack.") *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Although edited and mixed in the studio, all but the first two pieces on *Starless* were recorded live at King Crimson gigs in the fall of 1973. The essentially live nature of *Starless* received little if any attention in the press, who treated it as a studio album; the recording quality is superb, and all audience noise save a stray distant shout here and there has been skillfully deleted. Perhaps no one knew this was a live album until Fripp spilled the beans in the fine print of the *Young Persons' Guide.*

Chart 6	
Studio/live origins of songs on *Starless*	
Side One	
"The Great Deceiver"	recorded at AIR Studios, London, January 1974
"Lament"	recorded at AIR studios, London, January 1974
"We'll Let You Know"	recorded at the Apollo, Glasgow, Oct. 23 1973
"The Night Watch"	beginning section recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"Trio"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"The Mincer"	recorded at Parc des Exposition, Zurich, Nov. 15 1973
Side Two	
"Starless and Bible Black"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"Fracture"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973

Starless was the first King Crimson album other than the live *Earthbound* not to provide the lyrics on the cover or inner sleeve – perhaps intentionally to de-emphasize the verbal content?

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STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK

• David Cross: violin, viola, keyboards

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, devices

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

Side One

THE GREAT DECEIVER (by Wetton, Fripp, and Palmer-James). Studio recording. Slams off with a bluesy riff at hyperspeed. Sectional song contrasting instrumentals and vocals. Oblique references to the Devil. "The Great Deceiver" contains the only lyrics ever penned by Fripp for a King Crimson song: "Cigarettes, ice cream, figurines of the Virgin Mary" – a comment, he explained in 1980, on the woeful commercialization of Vatican City, which he'd visited on a Crimson tour in 1973. *(Watts 1980, 22)* For some reason I am reminded of a passage from the autobiography of spiritual teacher J.G. Bennett, who was to become a major influence on Fripp in 1974: "I can see how necessary it is to establish a new understanding of the Incarnation. The Church is equally astray in its conservative and in its modernist wings, nor is the centre any better. The Catholic Church is the custodian of a mystery that it does not understand; but the sacraments and their operation are no less real for that." *(Bennett, Witness, p. 354)*

LAMENT (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Studio recording. Slow Beatlish ballad that breaks out into rather more manic territory as the song progresses ... a la Lennon in the *White Album* period. The Beatles never had a coda that jammed out for a few bars in seven, however.

WE'LL LET YOU KNOW (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. Instrumental. Gradually coalesces, as so many King Crimson pieces do, out of sensitively random, intentionally chaotic points of noise, into motives, rhythms, melodies: into music ... of a sort.

THE NIGHT WATCH (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Introduction/beginning, live recording. Deftly spliced to the studio-recorded body of the song. Classic King Crimson minor ballad. Effectively understated ending.

TRIO (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. Peaceful, contemplative, tonal, somewhat out of character for a King Crimson III improvisation. Although Bruford does not play on "Trio," he is listed as one of the co-composers. Fripp later wrote in admiration of his drummer's restraint in this instance, explaining that Bruford was awarded joint authorship on the basis of his having "contributed silence." *(Fripp 1981B)* The same role – the conscious embodiment of the presence of silence – would later occasionally be assigned to a particular member of the League of Crafty Guitarists in their live performances.

THE MINCER (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Palmer-James). Live recording, with a few overdubs. Another example of what Crimson III was liable to sound like in the throes of improvisation. The song ends unaccountably in the middle – it sounds like the tape ran out.

Side Two

STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. More gradual coalescence out of chaos. The piece recalls the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." A lot of the high melodic stuff you hear is not Fripp but David Cross cranking up the distortion on his electric violin. Fripp ruminates meanwhile on his mellotron. Tonal center? – you tell me. Pieces like this can sound totally improvised until, miraculously, everyone slams into a downbeat at precisely the same moment. You never know with King Crimson. As Bruford said, "What we're really trying to do is to abolish the distinction between formal writing and improvising. Some of our most formal passages sound improvised and vice versa." *(Rosen 1983, 23)*

FRACTURE (by Fripp). Live recording. Fripp lays down a typically edgy angular ostinato. There's a lot of whole-tone-scale action going on in here. One of the most extensively worked-out pieces of the KC III period, "Fracture" places severe demands on technique. "One of

the reasons I wrote 'Fracture' in the manner which I wrote it," said Fripp, "was to put myself (and the band) in a certain situation where I had to practice every day because it's so difficult." *(Rosen 1983, 23)*

The "Red" Period and the Dissolution of King Crimson III

Inspiration continued to pay calls from time to time, but improvisation in the latter stages of King Crimson III grew increasingly frustrating. In February 1974, for instance, David Cross was reportedly having reservations: "It sometimes worries me, what we do – we stretch so far and our music is often a frightening expression of certain aspects of the world and people. It is important to have songs as well, written material, to counter-balance that so that they're not actually driven insane ... We've only had one moment of true peace in improvisation with this band, which was a thing we did with just violin, bass and guitar at a concert in Amsterdam. Most of the time our improvisation comes out of horror and panic." *(YPG 29, Sounds, Feb. 9 1974)* (The "moment of peace" Cross refers to is probably "Trio" as heard on *Starless*; he got mixed up as to the instrumentation, which is actually violin, flute-mellotron, and guitar.)

In an interview published in May, Fripp went public with his own reservations. The group was still trying out improvisational formats in live situations, Fripp explained: "What we do live is maybe just say, 'Bill, you just start playing, and we'll follow you.' But since this band isn't very sensitive or interested in listening to everyone playing, the improvisation in the band at the moment is extremely limited and more concerned with individuals showing off than in developing any kind of community improvisation ... I find it most frustrating that I can't make the other players in the band take as much interest in my playing as I do in theirs." *(Rosen 1974, 35)* With what was, from his perspective, one of King Crimson's primary *raisons d'etre* having stalled, it is not surprising that Fripp was beginning to lose interest in keeping the band alive. But there were other reasons too, as we shall shortly see.

Although not even Fripp was fully aware of the fact, King Crimson III after the *Starless* studio sessions in January 1974 was on its last legs. The band undertook three more road trips: Europe (eleven gigs, March 19-April 2); America (seventeen gigs, April 11-May 5); and a final U.S. tour (twenty-one gigs, June 4-July 1). The live album *USA*, released around April 1975, was recorded toward the end of this final U.S. tour: the song "Asbury Park" at the Asbury Park (New Jersey) Casino on June 28, and the rest two days later at the Palace Theatre in Providence, Rhode Island.

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USA

• David Cross: violin and keyboards

• Robert Fripp: guitar and mellotron

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

USA clearly shows that in terms of *sound*, at any rate, there was little or no difference between live and studio King Crimson of this period: as the band runs through "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part II," "Lament," "Exiles," and "Easy Money," there are few discernible musical differences between these and the previously recorded studio versions. Very slightly choppy

around certain edges, less dynamic range, not quite so beautifully recorded as the studio tracks, *USA* nevertheless demonstrates that very late KC III was eminently capable of delivering the goods live.

The one new track, "Asbury Park," represents King Crimson improvising straight ahead in 4/4 with Fripp and Cross getting in some vintage licks over Wetton's razor-sharp melodic bass lines and Bruford's crisp drumming – but one does sense a certain lack of group consciousness: for long sections it's four individual virtuoso musicians, each blowing his own horn.

The crowd's rowdy shouting through the soft introduction to "Exiles" gives some indication of one predicament Fripp was finding himself in, namely, how to break their expectations down sufficiently to get them to shut up and listen.

USA closes with a rendition of "Schizoid Man." Since the album was actually released after "Red," one has the feeling that Fripp was seeking something of a framing effect for King Crimson's total recorded output, which had begun six years earlier with the same song. In small print at the bottom of *USA*'s back cover are the letters: "R.I.P."

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King Crimson live was indeed finished with the "USA" tour, but no one recognized it at the time, not even Fripp, who said of the final gig, in New York's Central Park on July 1 1974, "For me it was the most powerful since 1969." *(YPG 30, July 1)* A week later the band – minus David Cross – was back in a London studio, at work on the album that was to become *Red. Red* would not be released, however, until after Robert Fripp had unilaterally disbanded King Crimson and talked to the press, offering three reasons why the King had to die: "The first is that it represents a change in the world. Second, whereas I once considered being part of a band like Crimson to be the best liberal education a young man could receive, I now know that isn't so. And third, the energies involved in the particular lifestyle of the band and in the music are no longer of value to the way I live." *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)*

At the cosmic level – the level of the changing world situation – Fripp spoke of a radical transition from the old world to the new. The old world was characterized by "dinosaur" institutions, social organizations, corporations, rock bands – as Fripp put it, "large and unwieldy, without much intelligence." *(Ibid.)* Looking to the future, Fripp foresaw "a decade of considerable panic in the 1990s – collapse on a colossal scale. The wind-down has already started ... It's no doomy thing – for the new world to flourish the old has to die. But the depression era of the Thirties will look like a Sunday outing compared to this apocalypse. I shall be blowing a bugle loudly from the sidelines." *(Dove 1974, 14)*

On the level of the music industry, Fripp had developed grave reservations: a dinosaur itself, "the rock & roll business is constructed on wholly false values, impermanent and mainly pernicious, although not in an obvious way." *(Dove 1974, 14)* Later, toward the end of the 1970s, Fripp would develop a systematic critique of music industry practices, write it up, and publish it in *Musician, Player, and Listener* magazine. For now he simply knew that he had had enough, and was looking to a future of "small, independent, mobile and intelligent units" to replace the lumbering Mesozoic automaton behemoths that passed for rock acts in 1974. *(SMALL, INDEPENDENT, MOBILE, AND INTELLIGENT UNIT became the Frippism* par excellence *of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its first appearance in print is apparently YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974.)*

On the level of the role he himself was playing in the rock and roll circus, Fripp had long felt frustration. At gigs like the ones in Italy already discussed, for instance, in which, as Fripp

put it, “the performance itself went quite well,” King Crimson’s artistic method had itself become brutal: “We battered the crowd with sound for forty minutes to make enough room for ten minutes of experimenting. Then, as attention wandered, we built up another level of pounding for twenty or thirty minutes, so a pulped crowd would feel it had its money’s value and go home happy.” *(Fripp 1981B, 114)* Elsewhere Fripp spoke with despair of his perception that the marijuana and LSD of the sixties had been gradually replaced by the cocaine, speed, and alcohol of the seventies, and that along with that shift went a corresponding change in audience demeanor.

This is art? This is magic? This is music? Beating the audience back, an audience either in a blind stupor or artificially stimulated, fighting the collective aggression of five thousand people, having to use your own limited energy to do it, night after night – this was accomplished, as Fripp expressed it, only “at the expense of creating something of a higher nature.” *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)*

At the personal level, there was the matter of continuing his own “education”, as he later described his predicament, he felt he had to disband King Crimson “because I could not see how it was possible to be a musician and a human being simultaneously.” *(Kozak 1981, 10)* But there was a deeper, and perhaps decisive reason why King Crimson had to be put to rest – an overwhelmingly powerful personal experience which so far as I know Fripp did not venture to disclose publicly until some five years after the fact, probably because it took him that long to understand what had actually happened. When he did talk to *Melody Maker* writer Allan Jones about it in 1979, he said that in the interviews done immediately following the Crimson break-up, he hadn’t known how to explain it.

> *I had a glimpse of something... The top of my head blew off.* That’s the easiest way of describing it. And for a period of three to six months it was impossible for me to function ... My ego went. I lost my ego for three months. We were recording “Red” and Bill Bruford would say, “Bob, what do you think?” And I’d say, “Well-” and *inside* I’d be thinking, how can *I* know *anything*? Who am *I* to express an opinion? And I’d say, “Whatever you think, Bill. Yes, whatever *you* like.”... It took me three to six months before a particular kind of Fripp personality grew back to the degree that I could participate in the normal day-to-day business of hustling ... *(Jones 1979A, 19)*

Given the pressure-cooker atmosphere into which commitment to the ever intangible yet fervently embraced idea of King Crimson had plunged him for five years – the surging and dashed hopes, the sensitive perception of false values all around, the perpetual instability of the band, the press filled with acclamation and denigration by turns, the uncertainties about his own accomplishments, aims/ends, and means of attaining them – it would perhaps not be difficult to explain away Fripp’s loss of ego in banal psychological terms. But to do so would be to miss and trivialize the fundamental point, which is that Fripp, to put it simply, had a revelation. The proverbial straw was reading the text of a lecture by J.G. Bennett the night before the *Red* recording sessions were to begin; the “Second Inaugural Address” to Bennett’s International Academy for Continuous Education in Sherborne. The Text was printed in the appendix to Bennett’s book *Is There Life on Earth?* This was the first time Fripp had come into contact with the teaching of Bennett, who had been a disciple of the infamous George Gurdjieff and had met many of the twentieth century’s leading mystical seekers. *(REPORTEDLY THE FIRST TIME Schruers 1979, 16)* Bennett and Gurdjieff taught that people ordinarily go through their lives in a state of relative unconsciousness; some of the methods Bennett and Gurdjieff used to “wake up” their students will be discussed in the next chapter. Fripp’s first encounter with Bennett’s ideas was electrifying, precipitating a major change of direction in his life.

Wetton and Bruford were both to express regrets with regard to Fripp's unilateral decision to break up the band. Bruford, who had quit the highly successful Yes to join King Crimson, and who had viewed Crimson as a unique opportunity to expand his horizons as a musician, did his best to be philosophical: while pointing out that Crimson's enviable position in the music world was the result of years of hard work by musicians, management, and devoted road crew, and that to have all that dashed at a stroke was "mildly irritating," Bruford said nevertheless he could cope with his irritation since it ultimately represented a "false adherence to [materialistic] things." *(YPG 32, Sounds, Oct. 12 1974)* Below his stoic surface, however, Bruford was profoundly disappointed.

By his own estimation, Wetton had not made the kind of commitment to King Crimson that Bruford had, and had not had to give up so much to join the group. But in retrospect, he admitted being "pretty pissed when it broke up. I didn't admit it at the time ... Robert called up and explained why he couldn't go on in the manner that we had been. He felt the world was going to come to an end and he wanted to prepare for it. And I said, 'Yeah, sure, OK, but let's get a good tour in first.'" *(Rosen 1983, 23)* (There had been, in fact, plans for another King Crimson tour, with founding King Crimson member Ian McDonald back in the band. Rehearsals had already begun when Fripp pulled the plug.)

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RED

• Robert Fripp: guitar and mellotron

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

With thanks to:

• David Cross: violin

• Mel Collins: soprano saxophone

• Ian McDonald: alto saxophone

• Robin Miller: oboe

• Marc Charig: cornet

Backtrack to July 1974. Fripp had had the top of his head blown off, and in an ego-less state carried on, with Bill Bruford and John Wetton, with the studio production of *Red.* A number of previous King Crimson members (David Cross, Mel Collins, Ian McDonald) and sidemen (Robin Miller, Marc Charig) made contributions to the album. *Red* is a peculiarly retrospective album: glancing through the song titles ("Red," "Fallen Angel," "One More Red Nightmare," "Providence," "Starless") one is struck as if by the facets of a diamond with the King Crimson myth/metaphor smoldering at its core. The striking black-and-white cover photograph of Wetton, Bruford, and Fripp (first ever cover photo of band members on a King Crimson record) in lighting that casts half of their faces into shadow harks back, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to the cover of *Meet the Beatles*, in 1964 an image indelibly stamped into the minds of a generation. (According to Fripp, the photo of the band was Mark Fenwick's idea; Fenwick was one of the three directors of EG Management. Fripp didn't want the musician's faces on the jacket; it reminded him less of *Meet the Beatles* than an album by Grand Funk

Railroad.) On *Red*'s back cover is a stark photograph of a gauge with the needle pointing into the red (danger, overload) zone. *Red* was released in early October.

Side One

RED (by Fripp). A divinely lurching, infernally flowing instrumental that exploits Fripp's by-now entrenched penchant for odd metrical schemes and whole-tone-scale root relationships and melodic turns. In the recurring main theme, the predominant interval between guitar (soprano) and bass is the tritone – also the sonority that ends the composition. In traditional tonal music theory, the tritone – so named because it spans three whole steps or tones, in this case the thematic example being the interval E to A# – is classed among the most dissonant of the thirteen fundamental intervals in music: if you turn in your college harmony assignment and have idiotically included a tritone in the final chord, you'll get it back marked in red. Because of its searingly harsh, problematic sound, the tritone was called the *diabolus in musica* ("the devil in music") by medieval theorists, and some forbade its use entirely. The King Crimson metaphor – it goes deeper than one might think.

FALLEN ANGEL (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). You think it's going to be just a genteel McCartneyesque ballad; then the distorted guitar comes careening in, in a middle section utilizing the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale; transition back to the ballad theme; harmonic minor fade-out.

ONE MORE RED NIGHTMARE (by Fripp and Wetton). That darned tritone outline again, those gnarly whole tones, those insane metrical changes, those fabulous fills by Bruford, hammering on a piece of sheet metal. It seems almost impossible that this was the same Fripp who had made the delicate *Islands* a few short years previously – a record that one of KC II's members had reportedly called "an airy-fairy piece of shit": this music has real muscle. *(Malamut 1974, 69)*

Side Two

PROVIDENCE (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). This was recorded live at the Providence, Rhode Island Palace Theatre on June 30, 1974 – the gig at which most of *USA* was taped, the day before King Crimson III's final performance in New York City. It begins with a delicate violin solo and goes into free-form improvisation, recalling the spaciness of "Moonchild" – but "Providence" has a ballsiness and level of aggression or even evil that "Moonchild," in its benighted innocence, seemed to lack.

STARLESS (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Palmer-James). More retrospection, and not merely on account of the song's title: at the outset, the mellotron's minor tones and the stately drumming recall "Epitaph." But "Starless" turns out to be more than just another gloomy minor mellotron epic, although clocking in at over twelve minutes it has the requisite duration. "Starless" is a grand synthesis, in one unified (if collectively authored) composition, of several of the styles Fripp and his various cohorts had cultivated since 1969: slow, melancholy minor-key epic/ballad; medium-tempo, abrasive riff-based linear counterpoint; extremely fast, frenetic group playing; and improvisational and compositional elements bound together in such a way that the seams are exceeding difficult to detect. "Starless" is more than all that, though: in my opinion it is simply the best composition King Crimson ever committed to record. It is also the only King Crimson piece that has ever made me weep – those tears that tend to issue out of a direct confrontation with what we feebly call "artistic greatness" but is really a portentous and rarely glimpsed secret locked away at the heart of human experience.

It is the curse of the scholar/writer/musician to be driven to rip apart that which he loves, dissecting and disemboweling, in a vain and perhaps pointless attempt to reduce the primal musical experience to words, formulas, theories, charts, diagrams, numbers, and so on – an exercise pleasing enough to the intellect and yet somehow painful for the heart. What follows, therefore, is not for the faint of heart, and if the reader does not give a hoot about formal musical analysis, she or he would probably do just as well to skip it. On the other hand, lest I paint myself into a corner of total futility, let me affirm my belief that at its best, analysis can be a valid form of translation – from the language of the heart into the language of the head. And inasmuch as head and heart are generally not so much in the habit of conversing amicably with each other as they could be, the translator's enterprise is perhaps not entirely meaningless. From listening to the music itself you can tell something about what the musicians are feeling, and open a door into that world of feeling within yourself; through analyzing the music seriously you can get some inkling of how the musicians think (and believe me, think they do, and think they must, in order to produce as coherent a piece as "Starless"), and in that process allow your intellect to go into sympathetic resonance with the intellects of those who are making the music.

Head and heart. Fripp would later develop a system of musical practice based on "hands, head, and heart," where the "hands" represent the physical contact with the instrument and indeed with the physical world of sensation itself. We can address the head and the heart when we write a book like this, I'm not so sure about the hands, that is, about addressing the very physical presence of music in a live situation. I incline to suppose that the most we can do along those lines is to be aware of, or at least try to avoid completely losing touch with, our body as we are writing and reading.

"Starless" is a long (12'18") sectional composition in a form that breaks down into essentially three parts; though "Starless" is not exactly a textbook example of classical sonata form, an analogy with sonata form's three part structure (exposition, development, recapitulation) is tempting:

Song – Exposition

Structured Instrumental Crescendo – Development

Free Recapitulation of Song (without vocal)

As in classical sonata form, the opening section of "Starless" sets out a number of musical ideas (themes); the structured instrumental crescendo has something of the free, fantasia, associative, spinning-out, through-composed, quasi-improvisational nature of a development section; and the recapitulation contains both themes of the exposition material in a new, transformed aspect. The opening "song" section remains in a single key (instead of containing a modulating bridge to a second key as in sonata form); and the structured instrumental section does not develop ideas from the opening song (as a sonata development ordinarily develops themes from the exposition), but rather stands on its own, with entirely new material. But these facts do not disqualify "Starless" from being considered a sonata form in the large sense; Mozart's sonata forms were one thing, Beethoven's another, Schoenberg's something else again, Bartok's a different species too. As music history went on, sonata form became something quite malleable indeed. Nor do I think it particularly relevant whether or not Fripp and his co-authors set out to compose a sonata form, nor whether some of them even knew what a sonata form was (Fripp and Cross probably did – the others may not have). When I met Brian Eno in 1988 and he was scanning through my book on his music, his eyes lit on one of the analytical passages and he said with a chuckle, "I didn't know that piece of mine was in the Dorian mode." But it was, and he was pleased to know about it with his head, though he had composed it entirely with his ears.

The sonata analogy can perhaps enable those who are familiar with the sonata form process in music history to *hear* “Starless” in a more thorough, integrated fashion.

A more detailed formal outline of “Starless” is shown in Chart 7.

Chart 7
Formal Outline of "Starless"

SONG -- EXPOSITION (4'17")
4/4 quarter=63

1.) 1st theme: instrumental (guitar melody) -- G minor.
2.) 2nd theme: 2 sung verses, each with refrain -- G minor.
3.) 1st theme: instrumental (guitar melody) -- G minor.
4.) 2nd theme: 3rd sung verse, with refrain -- G minor.

STRUCTURED INSTRUMENTAL CRESCENDO -- DEVELOPMENT (4'37")
bass in 13/8 eighth=114

5.) Bass ostinato, electric guitar repeated-note motive creeps ever higher, drums and percussion enter bit by bit -- C minor, with a prominent tritone (C-F#, in the bass ostinato and dissonant, chromatic notes in guitar motive.
6.) Short transitional episode (3/8, dotted quarter=116).

FREE RECAPITULATION (3'02")

7.) New, full band texture with saxophone improvisation prominent, bass ostinato (13/8, eighth=320, and guitar repeated notes related to the "crescendo" section -- C minor.
8.) 2nd theme: saxophone restatement of "verse" and "refrain" melodies from the exposition, bass pedal point replaces harmonic changes, tempo much accelerated over original version (4/4, quarter=160, -- melody in G minor, bass pedal point on C.
9.) Full texture as in section 7.
10.) Hugely effective modulation back to original key of G minor, 1st theme: saxophone restatement of instrumental guitar melody, with hard rock rather than fantasy ballad timbres, louder and faster (4/4, quarter=80).

"Starless" as a whole can be seen as a carefully graded swell of energy: by the end of the instrumental crescendo, things have reached such a desperate peak that you think there's nowhere else to go – but as happens so often in Beethoven codas, for instance, you are seized at that peak moment and hurtled into hyperspace. The recapitulation integrates and transforms the materials of the exposition and the crescendo, forcibly kicking them onto an entirely new level of intensity by means of dynamics, tempo, and orchestration.

The strange melancholy expressed initially in the words of the song ("Old friend charity / cruel twisted smile / and the smile signals emptiness for me / starless and bible black") is deepened and purified in the recapitulation, when the words are left behind. The restatement of the instrumental first theme and the final minor ending carry the weight of tragedy.

In its dark intensity, in the singularity of its formal conception, in its emphasis on extreme contrasts within a single piece, in its drive to associate specific musical gestures with states, qualities, gradations, and degrees of psychic energy, and – perhaps above all – in the blinding power of its execution, "Starless" is a fulfillment of tendencies in Fripp's music manifest from the beginning. With the final, hair-raising cadence of "Starless," the door slams shut on King Crimson's first period of activity, and, one could say, on the early era of progressive rock as a whole. When Fripp would emerge in the late 1970s with his solo projects, and in the early 1980s with a new, exceptionally streamlined King Crimson, the musical scene would have changed dramatically.

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Chapter Seven: Sabbatical

A life entangled with Fortune is like a torrent. It is turbulent and muddy; hard to pass and masterful of mood: noisy and of brief continuance.

– attributed to Epictetus

King Crimson can be seen as an experimental laboratory for the combining and recombining of living musical strains – for the production of "recombinant do-re-mi," to borrow a phrase from the title of a recent book by Billy Bergman and Richard Horn. Fripp reminds me a bit of Miles Davis in this respect: a subtly energetic electromagnet into whose force-field any number of leading musicians have found themselves drawn, only to have their musical genes reshuffled and to be ejected back out into the world with a different perspective. Several Crimson graduates went on to perhaps less experimental yet more lucrative pastures: Greg Lake (Emerson, Lake and Palmer), Ian McDonald (Foreigner), Boz Burrell (Bad Company), John Wetton (Asia), and Bill Bruford (who toured with Genesis in 1976). KC graduates also made solo albums: McDonald and Giles (*McDonald and Giles*, 1971), Gordon Haskell (*It Is and It Isn't*, 1971), Pete Sinfield (*Still*, 1973), and Bruford (four albums between 1978 and 1981).

British rock, particularly British progressive rock (whatever "progressive" may mean or not mean), is like a club or select society: the more you find out about it, the more you realize that practically everybody in the club has played in practically everyone else's group at one time or another. You can start almost anywhere you want and trace any number of interconnections, for instance: Cream to Blind Faith to Traffic, whose Dave Mason coproduced Family's debut album; Family's John Wetton was Roxy Music's bassist for a spell, Roxy Music's first synth player was Brian Eno, who used Phil Collins as a session drummer, who was Genesis' drummer behind Peter Gabriel, who worked with Fripp, whose later band the League of Gentlemen featured former XTC keyboardist Barry Andrews and whose bassist Sara Lee went on to play with Gang of Four. And so on.

It would be silly to say that Fripp, or anyone other single person, was at *the* center of this tangled mass of perpetually mutating strands of double-helical do-re-mi. Yet the Crimson King was inarguably one of the ribosomal focal points of creative synthesis, touching, in his eccentric way, all the musicians he worked with, and leaving his decisive stamp on the history of rock in the early 1970s and beyond.

Of the classic heavyweight progressive rockers, who had laid down a more convincing legacy than King Crimson? By 1974 Yes had lost themselves in grandiosity beyond all reasonable bounds (though continuing to play to huge popular acclaim); Emerson, Lake and Palmer were grandstanding with thirty-six tons of equipment and labored flashes of lasers and psychedelic music-hall brilliance; Procol Harum were drifting into repetition and stagnation with *Exotic Birds and Fruit*, less than a mere shadow of their one-time life and soul. Faced with such examples of dinosaur burnout, and listening to the records of all these groups today, I come away with a feeling that King Crimson's music of the period sounds infinitely less dated – Fripp, though he may have faltered from time to time, never completely lost sight of the goal. He was clearly in it for the music. It might be remarked that Fripp, in disbanding King Crimson in 1974, simply knew when to quit; like the Beatles in 1970, he knew when the dream was over, when to continue following the accustomed path meant certain creative death. But then, one of the marks of the superior creative talent is precisely knowing when to quit, when to seek out a new vision.

As hinted at in the previous chapter, particularly grating to Fripp was the commercial/music-industry aspect of the whole progressive rock spectacle. In the October 1974

Melody Maker interview where he explained his reasons for disbanding King Crimson, Fripp said that successful rock bands often "originally start out to service a need but you now have a situation where, being creative, they have to create needs in order that they may continue to exist. In other words, they've become vampiric." *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)* On the subject of the music itself, in 1987 Fripp dismissed early progressive/art-rock music as "a badly cobbled pastiche of a number of badly digested and ill-understood music forms." *(Diliberto 1987)*

A sense of no new worlds left to conquer, of the exhaustion of a particular set of possibilities. For an artist, to stay in the same place is to go backwards, to stop growing is to die.

As for Robert Fripp – who disbanded King Crimson in the face of what seemed to him insurmountable cosmic, business, and personal obstacles, and who effectively erased himself from the musical scene – for the moment, late 1974, he was indeed gone, top of head blown off, wandering around without a sense of ego. The Faustian pact was over, just like Lennon's dream. Music itself had stymied him, the presentation of meaningful music no longer seemed a real possibility.

Fripp wanted to wrap up his unfinished business, however, and did so in a number of projects, among them putting together *The Young Person's Guide to King Crimson*, a double-album "greatest hits" package which pointedly omitted "Schizoid Man." The album included a detailed chronology of King Crimson I-III compiled by Fripp from record and concert reviews, conversations with musicians, and Fripp's own journal entries. This was also the period when Fripp worked on preparing *USA* for release, recorded *Evening Star* with Eno, and appeared with Eno in a few small-scale European concerts.

On the break-up of King Crimson III, Fripp calculated that he had enough money to pay his bills for three years. *(Dove 1974, 14)* And indeed, even in his disoriented frame of mind, he was hatching a personal three-year plan consisting of preparation, withdrawal, and recovery. His activities of the first year – winding up his affairs – would prepare him for a decisive withdrawal from the music industry – and effectively from the outside world – at J.G. Bennett's International Society for Continuous Education at Sherborne House, following which he would survey the inner and outer landscapes and decide what to do next.

It is quite possible that Fripp's transformational experience at Sherborne – which is, if obliquely, the subject of this chapter – cannot be understood by anyone who has not undergone something similar. It is just possible, however, that some inkling of what was involved may be got by reviewing the historical backdrop of his experience. Since Fripp's subsequent music and public posture was deeply affected by his encounter with the Gurdjieff/Bennett tradition, and since only the most superficial information on that tradition was dispensed by the music press in the course of reviewing Fripp's work, I offer here a somewhat more substantial summary for the interested reader.

In recent years Fripp has publicly distanced himself from the Gurdjieff/Bennett tradition, preferring to claim only that he speaks for his own school, Guitar Craft. It was not so long ago, however, that he was splicing Bennett tapes into his albums and quoting Gurdjieff in his articles. It may in part have been the rock press's open hostility and ridicule of Fripp's apparent conversion to a "mystical cult" – though as far as I can make out, the Gurdjieff work is neither mystical nor a cult – that led him to his present position of reserve.

Gurdjieff

Who was George Ivanovich Gurdjieff? It appears that, even when he was alive – he died in 1949, his date of birth is uncertain, probably 1877 – if one asked ten people who knew him, one would receive ten different answers. Bennett wrote a biography of Gurdjieff, and his ultimate assessment of the man was that he was "more than a Teacher and less than a Prophet. He was a man with a true mission and he devoted his entire life to it. He needed people who could understand his message and yet he was compelled to make the message obscure and hard to understand. Therefore, he had to look for those who could acquire the required perspicacity and also the singleness of purpose to carry his work forward. Today [1973], twenty-four years after his death, there are thirty or forty people in different parts of the world who are capable of transmitting the teaching, but there are very few who can look beyond the man to his message." *(Bennett, Witness, 379)*

Since Gurdjieff's death, work with his methods has continued in formally and informally organized groups scattered across many countries. Any attempt to penetrate the real meaning of Gurdjieff's work leads to the inescapable conclusion that such meaning can be grasped only through sustained personal effort over a period of months and years – through self-observation, certain exercises carried out under the instruction of a qualified teacher, and a commitment to work on oneself in the context of a supportive community of fellow-seekers. Gurdjieff taught not so much a doctrine or creed as a method or a way, and it was a way whose transmission through mere books was deemed impossible.

Nevertheless he wrote a number of books himself, and a fair number of his followers, often after considerable gnashing of teeth and soul-searching – given the admittedly ineffable nature of the subject-matter – have over the years committed their thoughts on Gurdjieff, his ideas, and his methods to the printed page. In 1985 J. Walter Driscoll, in collaboration with the Gurdjieff Foundation of California, published *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography*, a remarkable listing of over 1,700 books, articles, reviews, unpublished manuscripts, and other items in English, French, and other languages. Through this source one can gain some considerable insight into the identity of this enigmatic figure and the profound impact he had on any soul so fortunate or unfortunate as to grapple with him.

Gurdjieff was born in the Armenian town of Alexandropol. With a Greek father and an Armenian mother, he had what one might call a flexible Middle Eastern appearance – one he would learn to shift, chameleon-like, at will, impersonating one or another race according to the demands of the moment. (With shaved head and groomed moustache, in his youth he looked perhaps not unlike the majestic Tony Levin.)

Gurdjieff's father was a successful, even rich, cattle herder until his animals were wiped out by a pestilence; after the loss of all his wealth he worked as a carpenter and at other jobs. Most important to Gurdjieff, however, was his father's avocation as an *asokh*, or story-telling bard, for which he was widely known, having at his command hundreds of songs, poems, legends, and folk-tales. From him Gurdjieff inherited not only treasures of ancient wisdom from a rapidly vanishing oral tradition, but a tendency to view the world in allegorical terms, as a surpassingly rich drama with elements both tragic and comic.

Gurdjieff was trained privately in medicine and Orthodox religion, but at some point around the age of twenty, driven by a need to seek answers to life's ultimate questions, he left his home environment and embarked on a lengthy series of travels around the Middle East, Central

Asia, Tibet, India, and Egypt, at times alone and at times in the company of a number of other singularly committed individuals who called themselves "The Seekers of Truth."

Tales of Gurdjieff's many expeditions and wanderings over this twenty-odd year period are told in his autobiography, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. The modern Western reader is bound to find much in this spiritual travelogue astonishing and almost literally unbelievable. Miracles, prodigious psychic feats, exotic customs, and a faraway fairy-tale or medieval atmosphere pervade the book. Gurdjieff portrays a fluid, teeming life at the mythical center of the world, the cradle of civilization – a life in which currents of the great organized world religions mix with esoteric teachings, in which traditional Asian cultures run up against the forces of modernization – a world in which contemporary Europeans are viewed almost universally as soulless fools, a world in which Western dividing lines between body and spirit, matter and psyche, the mundane and the paranormal blur and vanish under the searchlight of the seeker's unremitting will to know.

Enduring the harshest physical hardships, learning to be a trader, carpet dealer, businessman, fix-it man, con man, and consummate actor, drawing on his knowledge of some sixteen languages and dialects, Gurdjieff spent these years studying himself and the world, accumulating convincing evidence for the existence of higher powers, and meeting many, as he put it, "remarkable men" – gurus, yogis, fakirs, story-tellers, teachers, holy men, healers, monks – some situated in fantastically remote areas, hidden in monasteries unknown to the world and completely inaccessible to Westerners, where esoteric teachings had been transmitted orally for centuries, even millennia.

In 1912, convinced that he had discovered and mastered a certain knowledge whose core of truth is found in all genuine religious traditions, and whose lineage went back to pre-Babylonian ages, Gurdjieff went to Moscow, where he began the teaching efforts he would pursue the remainder of his life. One of his students was P.D. Ouspensky, with whom he would split in the 1920s, but who wrote a systematic account of Gurdjieff's early ideas and methods, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*, a book which Gurdjieff approved and cleared for publication shortly after Ouspensky's death in 1947.

The practical philosophy that Fripp was developing during his three-year retreat from the music industry, which he would put into practice in his musical work of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and which would turn up in full bloom in his Guitar Craft courses after 1985, owes much to Gurdjieffian ideas that Ouspensky relates in *In Search of the Miraculous.* The overarching theme of the book is the idea that in our normal state we human beings are asleep, unconscious, running on automatic. Our ideals, morals, ideologies, religion, art, and lofty philosophizing are all a sham, the product of instinctual groping in the dark, automatic mental associations, wishful thinking, bloated egotism, laziness, shallow romanticism. "It is possible to think for a thousand years," said Gurdjieff. "It is possible to write whole libraries of books, to create theories by the million, and all this in sleep, without any possibility of awakening. On the contrary, these books and these theories, written and created in sleep, will merely send other people to sleep, and so on." *(Ouspensky, 144)*

The individual human organism is merely an animal, according to Gurdjieff, a self-deluded machine, following the course of least resistance, slipping unconscious day by day to its ultimately inevitable death. Occultist students would ask Gurdjieff about life after death, reincarnation, and so on, and he would reply that for most people, death is indeed the ultimate end, you go out like a light and that is it. Only for those who had persistently labored to develop a soul, a real, permanent, unchangeable "I," was there any possibility that some essential quality of their being would survive the death of the physical body.

Fripp in his teaching does not speculate on the afterlife, but he shares the Gurdjieff/Ouspensky insistence on man in his normal state as a dozy automaton. It is a paradoxical doctrine, echoed through the ages in many teachings, including the Calvinist doctrine of predestination: we have no free will, development of one's freedom can begin only with a clear-headed recognition of one's absolute slavery to circumstance, mental associations, emotion, instinct, genetics, biochemistry, the laws of nature. Ouspensky quotes Gurdjieff as saying, "Every grown-up man consists wholly of habits, although he is often unaware of it and even denies having any habits at all ... The struggle with small habits is very difficult and boring, but without it self-observation is impossible." *(Ouspensky, 111-112)* From Fripp's *Guitar Craft Monograph III: Aphorisms*: "It is difficult to exaggerate the power of habit."

The Danish philosopher and religious thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), regarded as the fountainhead of twentieth-century secular and religious existentialism, maintained that the average person, going about his or her daily routines automatically, is as incapable of sin as he or she is of repentance. Kierkegaard, who spent his life as a writer championing conscious subjectivity as the sine qua non of authentic existence, and who wanted the words "The Individual" inscribed on his tombstone, was wont to find, as was Gurdjieff, confirmation of his own views in the words of Socrates: "Know thyself." Gurdjieff put it like this: "Individuality, a single and permanent I, consciousness, will, the *ability to do*, a state of inner freedom, all these are qualities which ordinary man does not possess. To the same category belongs the idea of good and evil, the very existence of which is connected with a *permanent* aim, with a *permanent* direction and a *permanent* center of gravity ... Permanent truth and permanent falsehood can exist only for a permanent man. If a man himself continually changes, then for him truth and falsehood will also continually change." *(Ouspensky, 159)*

Sometimes Gurdjieff would refer to his methods as the "Fourth Way." The first three ways were the way of the fakir, the way of the monk, and the way of the yogi. The fakir struggles with the physical body, devoting himself to mastering incredibly difficult physical exercises and postures. The way of the monk represents the way of faith, the cultivation of religious feelings, and self-sacrifice. The yogi's approach is through knowledge and the mind. Gurdjieff said of his Fourth Way that it combined work simultaneously on the body, emotions, and mind, and that it could be followed by ordinary people in everyday life – that it required no retirement into the desert. The Fourth Way did involve whole-hearted acceptance of certain conditions imposed by a teacher; it also involved supreme effort to devote oneself continuously to inner work, even though one's outward worldly roles might not change that much. In spite of his insistence that work without a teacher was impossible, Gurdjieff stressed each individual's responsibility:

> The fourth way differs from the other ways in that the principal demand made upon a man is the demand for understanding. A man must do nothing that he does not understand, except as an experiment under the supervision and direction of his teacher. The more a man understands what he is doing, the greater will be the results of his efforts. This is a fundamental principle of the fourth way. The results of work are in proportion to the consciousness of the work. No "faith" is required on the fourth way; on the contrary, faith of any kind is opposed to the fourth way. On the fourth way a man must satisfy himself of the truth of what he is told. And until he is satisfied he must do nothing. *(Ouspensky, 49)*

In the 1988 pamphlet "An Introduction to Guitar Craft," Fripp, who has explicitly called himself a follower of the Fourth Way, wrote, "In Guitar Craft there is nothing compulsory. One is not asked to violate cherished beliefs or accept any of the ideas presented. Rather, a healthy skepticism is encouraged." *(GC Phamplet I)*

By its very nature, the Fourth Way is not for everyone. Knowledge is not deliberately hidden, Gurdjieff would say, but most people simply are not interested. The former leader of a Gurdjieff group in Boston, Meggan Moorehead, told me of Gurdjieff's "five of twenty of twenty." Only twenty per cent of all people ever think seriously about higher realities; of these, only twenty per cent ever decide to do anything about it; and of these, only five per cent ever actually get anywhere.

What then is this "work"? Those in the Gurdjieff school write of "work on oneself," and often capitalize the concept, as in "The Work." Gurdjieff time and again insisted on the importance of direct transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, and emphatically warned of the grave dangers of attempting to learn exercises from a book or cramming one's head full of abstract spiritual notions on one's own. Those who have met an authentic teacher know the sense of *presence* so important to the whole process, the teacher is an *embodiment* of the knowledge of which he or she speaks, and in a sense what he or she *says* is of little importance compared with the student's opportunity to observe what he or she *is*. Descriptions of Gurdjieff by those who worked with him are filled with references to his effortless bearing, his economy of movement, his feline grace, his almost overwhelming physical presence as well as his spontaneity and earthy sense of humor. A student in Gurdjieff's Moscow circle described his first meeting with the teacher: "He looked at me, and I had the distinct impression that he took me in the palm of his hand and weighed me." *(Views from the Real World, 12)*

Although knowledge is not hoarded secretively, there are inevitable difficulties and pitfalls in efforts to share it with outsiders. Jesus called this "casting pearls before swine." Gurdjieff said students of his methods would find themselves "*unable* to transmit correctly what is said in the groups. [Students] very soon begin to learn *from their own personal experience* how much effort, how much time, and how much explaining is necessary in order to grasp what is said in groups. It becomes clear to them that they are unable to give their friends a right idea of what they have learned themselves." *(Ouspensky 223-224)* Ouspensky relates that in the early work with Gurdjieff in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it was strictly forbidden for students to write down, much less publish, anything at all connected with Gurdjieff and his ideas; somewhat later, Gurdjieff relaxed this rule, accepting as students many who subsequently published accounts of their experiences in the work.

Having, I think, caveated the whole matter sufficiently into the dust, I offer here a brief outsider's summary of what was involved in the work of Gurdjieff's groups.

Relaxation. Many of Gurdjieff's exercises involved or began with some sort of gradual relaxation of the muscles, starting with the muscles of the face and working downward through the body. Fripp has said that we can do nothing when not relaxed, and since his time at Sherborne has practiced a regular routine of relaxation in the morning before breakfast; such a ritual, led by a qualified instructor, has been worked into the Guitar Craft seminars. Along with relaxation goes a type of exercise for sensing the different parts of the body "from the inside." For Gurdjieff's groups, this might have involved, for instance, lying on one's back and concentrating all of one's awareness first on one's nose, then on one's right foot, and so on.

Other Exercises; The Movements. Ouspensky relates a series of what he found to be "unbelievably difficult" physical/mental exercises that Gurdjieff had picked up in various esoteric schools during his travels. *(Ouspensky, 358)* In general, these involved some precise and exact combination of counting, breathing, sensing of body parts, and movements, to be done in some coordinated sequence. The famous "movements," often done to music Gurdjieff had composed himself, were dances based on those Gurdjieff had observed and participated in, notably among sufis and dervishes, and in ancient hidden monasteries. Gurdjieff taught that the movements were

not merely calisthenics, exercises in concentration, and displays of bodily coordination and aesthetic sensibility: on the contrary, in the movements was embedded real, concrete knowledge, passed from generation to generation of initiates – each posture and gesture representing some cosmic truth that the informed observer could read like a book.

Division of Attention. Gurdjieff encouraged his students to cultivate the ability to divide their attention, that is, the ability to remain fully focussed on two or more things at the same time. One might, for instance, let half of one's attention dwell in one's little finger, while the other half is devoted to an intellectual discussion. In the division of attention, it is not a matter of going back and forth between one thing and another, but experiencing them both fully simultaneously. Beyond the division of attention lies "remembering oneself" – a frame of mind, permanent in the hypothetical perfected person, fleeting and temporary in the rest of us, in which we see what is seen without ever losing sight of *ourselves seeing.* Ordinarily, when concentrating on something, we lose our sense of "I," although we may as it were passively react to the stimulus we are concentrating on. In self-remembering the "I" is not lost, and only when we maintain that sense of "I," according to Gurdjieff, are we really awake. Like mastery on a musical instrument, such forms of heightened self-awareness can be developed only with years of practice.

Hands, Head, and Heart. With many variations and complications over the years, Gurdjieff's theoretical picture of the human organism boils down to a tripartite model consisting of three "centers": the moving, the emotional, and the thinking. Becoming a genuine person involves coordinating the three centers and becoming capable of conscious labor and intentional suffering.

Abstract Symbolism. Gurdjieff was fond of elaborate theorizing – the construction of intricate symbolic systems embodying or representing the relationships between phenomena at all levels of existence from the atom to the universe. Ouspensky devotes pages and pages to Gurdjieff's concept of "octaves" – the musical scale do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do taken as a sort of universal yardstick for determining the measurements and proportions of all of nature's parts. (The theory of octaves had a tremendous impact on pianist Keith Jarrett, who read about them in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff's longest, most allegorical, and most difficult book.) Some Gurdjieff students and groups gloss over the octaves or dispense with them entirely. My own feeling is that the theory of octaves has a lot in common with medieval Western musical theorists' preoccupation with theo-numerological speculation based on interval integer ratios and their symbolic significance. In point of fact, Gurdjieff had studied the medieval alchemists and on occasion was prone to speak of the human organism as a sort of alchemical factory for the transformation of various material and psychic substances. *(Ouspensky, 179-180)*

It seems that where there is music, and where there are people who philosophize about it, there will be some form of numerology and arcane quasi-mathematics. Since both musical pitch and musical rhythm are readily represented in numerical forms, the urge to find primal mathematical significance in music is almost impossible to resist. A contemporary example of this perennially seductive train of thought is Peter Michael Hamel's book *Through Music to the Self.*

Another symbolic thought-form Gurdjieff worked with was the enneagram, a circle with nine points around its circumference. Said Gurdjieff, "The enneagram is a *universal symbol.* All knowledge can be included in the enneagram and with the help of the enneagram it can be interpreted ... A man may be quite alone in the desert and he can trace the enneagram in the sand and in it read the eternal laws of the universe. And every time he can learn something new, something he did not know before." *(Ouspensky, 294)*

Through the elaboration of the law of octaves and the meaning of the enneagram, Gurdjieff offered his students alternative means of conceptualizing the world and their place in it. When I say "alternative," I am suggesting that Gurdjieff sought alternatives to rational, linear, language-oriented exposition and rhetoric (though he was by all accounts also a spellbinding speaker). In other words, Gurdjieff's ideas could be only partially expounded in ordinary words and sentences; to go beyond language he drew on music (he played several instruments and Bennett tells of him improvising unearthly melodies on a small organ late at night), dance, and visual symbols such as the enneagram.

Furthermore, it is my impression that Gurdjieff was happy to talk theoretically with students who were theoretically inclined, but that the theory itself is not an indispensable part of his overall teaching. Or, to put it slightly differently, Gurdjieff used, for instance, the complicated machinery of the law of octaves in order to teach his students to think. And in some respects the process of thinking was more important than the theoretical content of what was thought.

Conditions. Gurdjieff laid emphasis on the idea that the seeker must conduct his or her own search – and that the teacher cannot do the student's work for the student, but is more of a guide on the path to self-discovery. As a teacher, Gurdjieff specialized in creating conditions for students – conditions in which growth was possible, in which efficient progress could be made by the willing. To find oneself in a set of conditions a gifted teacher has arranged has another benefit. As Gurdjieff put it, "You must realize that each man has a definite repertoire of roles which he plays in ordinary circumstances ... but put him into even only slightly different circumstances and he is unable to find a suitable role and *for a short time he becomes himself.*" *(Ouspensky, 239)*

In 1918 the turmoil of the Russian revolution forced Gurdjieff and a small group of devoted followers out of Moscow to Essentuki in the Caucasus. For the next four years the core group moved from place to place, from Tiflis in Georgia to Constantinople to Germany. In 1922 Gurdjieff finally managed to establish a more or less stable base of operations, which he dubbed the "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man," at the Chateau de Prieure in Fontainbleau, near Paris. The Institute's varied activities attracted many new people to Gurdjieff's ideas, and in 1924 he went on a short visit to America where he stirred up much interest and started a group in New York. He returned to France. At this moment of the beginnings of success on a larger scale, Gurdjieff was nearly killed in an automobile accident. During his long recuperation his teaching activities came to an almost complete halt, but from this time to 1935 he did manage to write his three primary works, *Beelzebub's Tales*, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, and *Life Is Real Only Then, When "I Am."*

If *Beelzebub's Tales* is an elaborate modern mythological tapestry and *Meetings* is a spiritual travelogue, then *Life Is Real Only Then* is a portrait of the creative process in fluid motion. Gurdjieff's most self-revealing book, it takes the reader into Gurdjieff's own associative thought-processes, for instance in those passages where he writes about writing itself, the trains of thought that led him, when still a young man, to renounce all use of his exceptional psychic powers, the somewhat brutal methods he used to whip his New York followers into shape, and his superhuman, insomniacal efforts to keep his Institute functioning and together on a sound financial footing in the Fontainbleau days. *Life Is Real* was never finished – it ends poignantly with a colon.

In the 1930s and 1940s Gurdjieff worked with small groups in Paris, where he lived, and New York. Gurdjieff himself was ultimately an enigma to Westerners, even to those who knew

him best. It is doubtful that we will ever know the "person" behind the tremendous force of personality he exerted upon all who worked with him. In times of the greatest personal crisis, he would withdraw into the circle of his family. He placed extreme demands on his students, but seemed to demand infinitely more of himself. Teacher or prophet, rogue or saint, wily man or gracious servant of God, Gurdjieff today is gone, and among some of his followers there lingers an eschatological atmosphere, a memory-afterglow of a not-so-distant time past when the infinite was concretely embodied in time.

Bennett

John G. Bennett, an on-and-off student of Gurdjieff's, was another kettle of fish altogether – Western, modern, more recognizably human. To Bennett's autobiography, *Witness: The Story of a Search*, Fripp contributed a back-cover blurb which reads: "If a stiff Englishman like Mr. B. could do it, there's hope for the rest of us. In our time and culture we had a teacher who went through all the steps himself, took the leap, and came back to explain how we could do the same. When I found him, the top of my head blew off."

Bennett did not disguise himself the way Gurdjieff did, with layers of acting, multiple personas, irony, sarcasm, ambiguity – with rumors of scandalous personal conduct intentionally encouraged, nor with a misty, shadowy, mythologized, fairy-tale past. Bennett's autobiography reveals sincerity, openness, doubt, curiosity, and compassion from beginning to end. But like Gurdjieff, Bennett traveled widely, had at his command numerous languages, educated himself in religion, underwent many profound inner experiences, and led groups of students to unlock their own human potential. As he tells the story in his autobiography, although various spiritual leaders had urged him at various points in his life to strike out on his own path, it was not until near the end of his years that he felt fully confident to assume the mantle of the teacher. Bennett relates how Gurdjieff had told him in 1923 that one day Bennett would "follow in his footsteps and take up the work he had started at Fontainebleau." *(Bennett, Witness, p. 372)* In 1970, following the promptings of a still, small voice from within that said, "You are to found a school," Bennett organized the International Academy for Continuous Education. The name was chosen "to indicate on the one hand its Platonic inspiration and on the other to emphasize that it was to offer a teaching for the whole life of the men and women who came to it." *(Bennett, Witness, 374)*

Bennett writes of his inner transformative experiences with clinical accuracy, in a measured, matter-of-fact tone that is sufficient to throw the skeptical off guard. His first significant brush with unseen realities came in 1918, at the age of twenty, when he was blown off his motorcycle by an exploding shell in France during the first World War. Taken to a military hospital, operated upon, and remaining, to all outward appearances, in a coma for six days, Bennett recalls that some part of his awareness was not completely gone, he saw his body from the outside, he could feel the other injured men in the room, he heard voices from time to time. Hanging between death and life, "It was perfectly clear to me that being dead is quite unlike being very ill or very weak or helpless. So far as I was concerned, there was no fear at all. And yet I have never been a brave man and was certainly still afraid of heavy gun fire. I was cognizant of my complete indifference toward my own body." *(Bennett, Witness, 3-4)* This experience set his life on a new course – he describes the return to normal existence as the return to a body that was now in some sense a stranger.

Bennett developed a passion for the Turkish language and got a job in the British Intelligence Service in Istanbul. He was to become gradually convinced that his soul had come

from somewhere in the East, and was puzzled as to why he should have been born in England. (Hasan Shushud was much later to explain to him, "The wind can blow the seed across continents. The wind is blowing towards England now. That is why you were born here." *[Bennett, 376]*) But even as a young man, he was fascinated by the rich Asiatic tumult of life in Istanbul, and by the very different structure of the language, which seemed to indicate a whole way of thinking, a mode of being quite foreign to Europeans. Contact with Islam, with dervishes, with many clashing cultures, forced Bennett to certain practical conclusions: "All day long I was dealing with different races: English, French, Italian, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, Arab, Jews and people so mixed up as to be no race at all. Each and every one was convinced of the superiority of his own people. How could everyone be right and all the rest wrong? It was nonsense." *(Bennett, 36)*

Studying Persian and Turkish literature, Bennett soon met a certain Prince Sabaheddin, who in the course of many philosophical conversations introduced him to a wide range of religious and occultist ideas, including Theosophy and Anthroposophy. At this time a pattern in Bennett's life began to develop: he was, on the one hand, engaged in strenuous professional activity that required a great deal of his energy – on the other hand he felt determined to pursue the search for a deeper reality. It was a struggle between two worlds that he carried out nearly his entire life.

It was through Sabaheddin that Bennett met Gurdjieff – a meeting he called "the second decisive event of my life." *(Bennett, 51)* Gurdjieff was in Istanbul en route from Tiflis to Europe, working with students, giving lectures and demonstrations. Ouspensky was in town at the same time – Bennett met him also, and was later to become his student – but working more or less independently from Gurdjieff. Bennett's reaction to meeting Gurdjieff was typical. Impressed from the outset by "the strangest eyes I have ever seen," Bennett spoke about his experiments in hypnotism. Gurdjieff listened attentively, and Bennett "felt that he was not so much following my words as participating directly in the experience. I had never before had the same feeling of being understood better than I understood myself." *(Bennett, 56)* After Gurdjieff responded with a lengthy, masterful spoken dissertation on the theory and practice of hypnotism, Bennett, spellbound, felt "acutely aware of my own inadequacy. I was sure that he could answer my questions – but I did not know what questions to ask." *(Bennett, 57)*

Bennett was an accomplished mathematician, and the conversation turned to a theory of the fifth dimension he had recently developed as the result of a vision. Gurdjieff again listened seriously. Finally he responded, "Your guess is right. There are higher dimensions or higher worlds where the higher faculties of man have free play. But what is the use of studying these worlds theoretically? Suppose that you could prove mathematically that the fifth dimension really does exist, what use would that be to you so long as you remain here? ... Change ... will not come about through study ... It is like a man who knows all about money and the laws of banking, but has no money of his own in the bank. What does all his knowledge do for him?" *(Bennett, 58-59)*

Although deeply moved by Gurdjieff's words, and the manner in which they were spoken, at this stage Bennett still found outer life "too full and too interesting to leave place for so exacting a discipline as Gurdjieff was likely to demand." *(Bennett, 61)*

It is impossible in these pages to recount Bennett's material and spiritual pilgrimage in full detail. In 1923, on Ouspensky's advice, he stayed at Gurdjieff's Institute at Fontainebleau for several weeks, and in his autobiography recounts the atmosphere of feverish activity, the difficult physical labor, the psychological exercises, the work on movements, Gurdjieff's taunting, goading, and kindliness. Bennett – enthusiastic, receptive, overworked, and physically ill – was

inspired at Fontainbleau to grand numinous insights the likes of which it would be presumptuous and foolhardy of me to attempt to condense into a few phrases.

Gurdjieff, who led Bennett at every step, ultimately invited him to stay for a period of two years, after which, he said, it would be possible for Bennett to continue to work alone. Bennett felt he could not accept the offer – he was not yet ready. He returned to England. For the next twenty-five years Bennett pursued his double life: man of affairs, coal researcher, industrial advisor; and writer of spiritualist/theoretical tomes, student of Ouspensky, seeker, reluctant leader of his own discussion groups.

In 1948 Bennett returned for the last time to Gurdjieff, who was living and taking students in small lodgings in Paris. Gurdjieff astonished him by picking up his education precisely where it had been left off at the Institute two and a half decades before. Gurdjieff's diagnosis of Bennett's state was much the same: "Now you have much knowledge, but in Being you are a nullity ... You think too much." *(Bennett, 239)* Once more Bennett plunged into exercises, readings, the work.

Shortly after Bennett's arrival in Paris, Gurdjieff suffered another terrible car accident. Refusing all medical help, he slowly nursed himself back to seemingly almost-normal health, but it appears that his recovery this time was not complete. By mid-1949, at which time Bennett was regularly going back and forth across the English Channel between his worldly commitments and his apprenticeship with Gurdjieff, Gurdjieff's health was rapidly failing. On October 28, by Bennett's account, Gurdjieff's American doctor finally "took the situation in hand, and moved him to the American Hospital. He tapped his dropsy. Gurdjieff watched, smoking a cigarette, cracking jokes and saying 'Bravo America.' He lay down, and never rose again. He passed into a peaceful sleep, and his breathing gradually died away. At eleven a.m. on Saturday morning, 29th October, he was dead. The autopsy showed that most of his internal organs were so degenerated that no doctor could understand how he had lived so long." *(Bennett, 271)*

Gurdjieff's death left Bennett in confusion. He felt he had not yet undergone the complete, conscious death and rebirth spoken of in traditional sacred doctrines and conceived by Gurdjieff as true liberation. He continued to work in groups, but felt that it was going nowhere. Clearly distinguished among his friends and fellow seekers as especially gifted, he continued to waver: "I was increasingly aware of the limits of my strength, and even more of my wisdom. I could never dare to take the risk with the inner world of others that Gurdjieff was prepared to take." *(Bennett, 285)*

Subsequent travels to the Holy Lands and Persia brought Bennett into renewed contact with living sources of religious traditions in all their timeless mystery. In the late 1950s he was attracted to the Subud phenomenon, whose central experience was the *latithan*, a sort of intense guided meditation that led to immediately and radically altered states of consciousness. From the descriptions Bennett gives, it appears that the *latithan* may have been somewhat similar to the methods used by the likes of the Guru Maharaji, the Indian boy-teacher who swept through the West in the early 1970s (and cleaned out the minds of several of my friends in the process) – dramatic, instantaneous psychological results of somewhat dubious significance.

After extensive work with the *latithan*, Bennett concluded that he "had ceased to work on myself and had relied on the *latithan* to do what I should be doing by my own effort." *(Bennett, 350)* In 1960 he abandoned Subud and resumed the disciplines Gurdjieff had taught him. After long inner deliberations he joined the Catholic Church, which, as I have already mentioned in this book, he regarded as "the custodian of a mystery that it does not understand." *(Bennett, 354)* He met the one-hundred-and thirty-six-year-old Shivapuri Baba in Nepal.

Bennett, who had lived a full personal and professional life, subjected himself to a wide variety of disciplines, met and studied under different teachers, and worked on himself seriously since the 1920s, gradually came to trust the promptings of his own inner voice. In 1962 he was sixty-five, and, as he put it, "For the first time, I was daring to be myself." He organized seminars and guided students with a new confidence. Throughout the 1960s he devoted much thought to modern education, and began to seek out alternatives. Hasan Shushud, a Sufi from Bosphorus, eventually managed to convince Bennett that he should take the leap, exert his independence from all existing groups, and follow his own path.

The final chapter of Bennett's autobiography concerns the steps he took to found his International Society for Continuous Education, and the philosophy behind it. With regard to the modern world at large, Bennett was a pessimist in the short run and an optimist in the long run. Like his New Testament namesake, John of Patmos, author of the Book of Revelation, Bennett believed in imminent apocalypse: in 1973 he wrote that "we are in the early stages of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ which heralds the end of the present world." *(Bennett, iii)* The old world would disintegrate before the end of the twentieth century. But Bennett did not prophesy outright doom and destruction; rather, he called on men and women to work to create a counter-movement that would lay the foundations for the new world.

Bennett pointed to familiar threatening signs: morally unchecked acceleration of technology – with "knowledge" (that is, largely uninterpreted *information*) doubling every ten years or less, and visionary leadership able to interpret this information ever more scarce; proliferation of nuclear weapons; population explosion and unstable food supplies; growing scientific evidence of global climatic changes; gigantic government and corporate structures unable to control the chain of events. Bennett foresaw a time of panic and breakdown, during which faith in traditional institutions and governments would be irrevocably lost. After a transitional period of thirty or forty years, a new social order would arise: "It will be neither capitalist nor communist, neither national nor international but consist of largely self-supporting experimental settlements learning to help one another to survive. The big cities will slowly be depopulated and fall into decay. National governments will be replaced by agencies, whose main function will be to maintain the distribution of vital supplies. Life will simplify." *(Bennett, iv)*

Bennett saw his Society for Continuous Education as a place where people who were already to some degree aware of the world's coming cataclysmic changes could be "trained to perceive, to understand, and to withstand the strains of the world process." *(Bennett, v)* His long life's search had led him to the conclusion that some version of Gurdjieff's methods, supplemented by techniques from other sources, could provide the requisite training. Aside from cultivating productive transformation in its participants' consciousness, the Society and similar experimental communities would stand as beacons of light, for all to see, and perchance to imitate, in a world inexorably slipping into a global dark night of the soul.

In 1971 Bennett bought Sherborne House, a huge, stately old building surrounded by gardens and meadows, which had served as a boy's school, in the Cotswold Hills of Gloucestershire. (According to Fripp, the school had been the model for the boarding school in the movie *If.*) On a lecture tour of colleges in the United States he rounded up some ninety candidates for his training. With the help of his wife and several assistants, Bennett inaugurated the Academy on October 15, 1971. The derelict state of Sherborne House provided plenty of work for the trainees: cooking, washing, and heating facilities were inadequate, and much had to be improvised. Students who had fancied themselves in for a few months of utopian dalliance in agreeable countryside surroundings were rudely awakened. Uncomfortable conditions, hard physical work, lectures, the Gurdjieff movements, discussions, psychological exercises, and

conflict were the order of the day. The First Course lasted some ten months; Bennett graduated his first "class," whom he encouraged to return home and share what they had learned with small groups.

Bennett administered a Second Course for new students in 1972-1973, and a Third in 1973-1974. He planned to give five such courses and then, in 1976-1977, "to invite [back] those who have shown themselves capable of transmitting what they have learned and are ready to make a step forward." *(Bennett, 378)* The Fourth Course, beginning in October 1974, was to be Bennett's last. He had been seeking a place in America where he might found a community and school along the Sherborne lines, and in October purchased Claymont Court, a farm and mansion on nearly four hundred acres of scenic property in the Shenandoah Valley of West Virginia. Pierre Elliot, a boyhood friend of Bennett's, who had worked with both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, was chosen to head the American Society for Continuous Education.

Bennett, who had worked unceasingly on these projects for several years, died on December 13, 1974. As his wife, Elizabeth, put it, "His control over his physical organism was such that very few people at Sherborne knew that so short a time was left to him." *(Bennett, Epilogue, n.p.)*

Gurdjieff spoke of the awakening of the individual; Bennett took this message and gave it a global political meaning. Gurdjieff concentrated on shocking people into awareness; Bennett spoke openly of co-operation, selflessness, humility, preservation, and love.

Fripp at Sherborne

To Fripp, Bennett was "living proof that if a creepy, uptight Englishman, with severe emotional problems, could become a human being through dint of effort, so could I." *(Watts 1980, 22)* However, in recent years Fripp has been at pains to point out that he is "not an advocate of Mr. Bennett's ideas. I recommend Mr. Bennett's ideas to virtually no one. I'm an advocate of Guitar Craft, I speak for Guitar Craft. But Mr. Bennett would be inappropriate for nearly everyone I know. Not for me. But I'm not an advocate for Mr. Bennett at all." *(Drozdowski 1989, 32)*

Fripp attended the Fifth Course at Sherborne, beginning in October 1975 and lasting for ten months. It must have been an emotional time for all concerned, with the great teacher recently deceased, and with his widow – who had been one of Gurdjieff's several female assistants in Paris – in charge of the proceedings.

Fripp gave one of his accounts of his Sherborne year when Stephe Pritchard, during the 1981 *Recorder Three* interview, asked him, "In what ways do you think Gurdjieff has influenced you?" Fripp answered, "Well, I probably wouldn't be here now, certainly not in this form, if I hadn't come across that." Fripp described how, during the ten-month course at Sherborne, students were allowed to leave the premises only one day every three weeks. "We lost three people to the asylum in my year and overall twenty per cent [of the students] left ... It was very, very hard work; it was the difference between working on the inside and the outside, that if you're feeling a bit pissed off you can go to the pictures or watch television or get drunk or do whatever. But in Sherborne you had to sit there and find a way of dealing with it – the expression would be working with it – not easy. The woman I was living with left me while I was there which was awful for me – I was pretty suicidal – it was not easy. But, on the other hand, that was certainly the beginning of my life, if you like." Fripp went on to describe the day's regimen, which began with rising at six in the morning (at four-thirty if one had kitchen duty). Morning

psychological exercises were conducted at quarter to seven, followed by breakfast at seven thirty. At eight-thirty began the day's work with practical skills, including metal work, stonemasonry, carpentry, and so on. "In addition to practical work we had cosmological lectures, there were remarkable Gurdjieff movements, sacred kinesis; but essentially it was very practical, the school wasn't primarily theoretical." Many issues that came up during the year "confounded the mind," proving unamenable to rational analysis. The living quarters were cold, uncomfortable, and lacked privacy (Fripp shared a dorm room with five other men). Psychologically provocative situations constantly arose among the residents. And to top it off, Fripp even came to believe the house was haunted. *(Recorder Three, n.p.)*

Because of the manifold opportunities thus offered to confront himself, Fripp later looked back on his year at Sherborne with gratitude. He has spoken of the profound value of having one's grandiose self-image mercilessly deflated by harsh physical and psychological conditions. As he tells it, most of the hundred or so people who attended the course came there with some more or less definite feeling that they had been specially selected by God to save the world. Fripp's own fantasy, rudely shattered by Sherborne's regimen and realism, was that he was to become an ordained minister, perhaps to carry on as rock star and man of the cloth simultaneously. *(Jones 1979A, 20)* As it turned out, by the time he left, although he felt he had been given an inkling of life's inner purpose and significance, and a more explicit sense of the dynamics of his own individual psychic economy, he had no plans other than to allow the future to present itself.

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Chapter Eight: Out of Retirement – The Drive to 1981

Small is beautiful.

– E.F. Schumacher

During his period of retreat, Robert Fripp had had no concrete plans for returning to music; before breaking up King Crimson III in 1974, he had concluded that being a rock star was no longer conducive to his continuing self-education, that it was, in fact, counter-productive to his aims. With the self-imposed retreat drawing to an end, Fripp did not thus return to the music world with a loud splash, making his presence known to one and all in a grandiose gesture. Rather, he stuck his toe in the water bit by bit, carefully considering whether the world of the professional musician was a suitable arena for his activities.

Fripp loves to formulate little paradigmatic lists, and in 1982 he was to formalize what he called the "four criteria for work": work should earn a living, be educational, be fun, and be socially useful. As he leaked out of retirement in 1977 and 1978, Fripp was gradually able to acknowledge that for him, working in the music industry could be all of the above. Although in some respects Fripp seems a solitary introvert, living in a world of his own, on a plane of symbolic structures of his own devising which very few others are able to understand, let alone accept whole-heartedly, he was to receive much encouragement from friends old and new during this period, and was to succeed in carrying his musical odyssey through the next several island links in the archipelago of his life's work. In retreat he had reached the point of realizing he could choose what he wanted to do, so now, he could choose music freely – spontaneously after reflection, to paraphrase Kierkegaard.

With Peter Gabriel

The first step out of retirement came in response to a call from Peter Gabriel, who in early 1977 was in Toronto making his first solo album *Peter Gabriel* (for Atco), having left Genesis in 1975. Genesis, one of the prototypical progressive rock bands of the early 1970s, was known for its elaborate stage shows and psychodramatic pyrotechnics sparked in large part by Gabriel's magnetic stage presence, vocal abilities, and wonderfully imaginative songwriting; the zenith of Genesis' early period of activity was their 1974 rock opera, *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway.* Fripp had ambivalent feelings about returning to active involvement in music, and hence felt obliged to stipulate to Gabriel that he would be free to withdraw after three days if his presence turned out not to be "appropriate." In the studio sessions themselves, although he got along well enough with producer Bob Ezrin, Fripp felt constricted musically, unable to express himself fluently. He found himself caught on the horns of a dilemma: "After three days, having discovered it *wasn't* appropriate, I didn't *want* to leave. I didn't want to leave my friends to be *ravaged.*"

Fripp's contributions to Gabriel's first album are minimal: discreet touches here and there on electric guitar, classical guitar, and banjo. The following year, Gabriel invited Fripp to produce his second album (also titled *Peter Gabriel*, but on the Atlantic label). Comparing the two albums side by side reveals vastly different production values. With Ezrin Gabriel had cultivated a wide-open approach: huge orchestral textures, ample synthesizer padding, cavernous drum fills, exotic percussion, luscious reverb and echo on the vocal tracks, a sense of limitless expansive spaces, of gigantism and melodrama. If *Peter Gabriel* 1977 sounds like it was recorded

in a heavenly cathedral, *Peter Gabriel* 1978 sounds like it comes out of a dingy garage: Fripp persuaded Gabriel to cut back drastically on the electronically-induced spaciousness and instead opt for the close, tight, dry, realistic "live"-type sound King Crimson's recorded music had nearly always had – the production strategy Fripp was later to call *audio verite.*

Perhaps Fripp succeeded (however temporarily) in bringing the sound of Gabriel's music closer to "reality" – out of the inflatedly progressive early 1970s into the stripped-down late 1970s. But in the long view, I'm not sure Fripp in his role as producer, in his zeal for sonic sobriety and acoustical honesty, fully appreciated the nature of Gabriel's talents – Gabriel the superb harmonist, the luxuriant-dream-weaver, the transcendental vocalist, the peerless timbralist and rock song-texture-crafter. It might not be stretching it too much to say that Fripp has essentially never accepted the making of records as a valid artistic medium in its own right, but rather views the whole studio process as a necessary evil whose sole purpose is to produce inevitably second-rate reproductions of the real thing, live music. *Peter Gabriel* 1978 shows us a very Frippicized Gabriel, as though Fripp was doing his utmost to incorporate Gabriel into his own scheme of things. In the long view, I think we should be thankful he didn't succeed.

In addition to producing the album, Fripp played on many of the pieces; he shines particularly brightly in the angular electric guitar solo on "White Shadow" and in the cascading, foreboding Frippertronics of "Exposure," a song he co-wrote with Gabriel.

Living in New York City

After the 1976 sessions with Gabriel, Fripp returned to England to work on editing taped Bennett lectures and preparing them for publication. Even after what he called the "very demoralizing and depressing experience" of working on *Peter Gabriel I* in Canada, Fripp agreed to do some shows with Gabriel in America in February 1977. At the beginning Fripp, not quite ready for full exposure, sat offstage and played guitar hidden from the audience's view; by the end of the tour he was performing onstage with the rest of the band. Immediately before the tour, Fripp had moved to New York City, which would remain, as he put it, his "center of gravity" for the next several years.

The downtown Manhattan arts and music scene seems to thrive and stagnate in cycles. In the late 1970s it was thriving on a peculiar constellation of elements – ideas about art and cross-pollination between the arts – as well as a rich crop of talent: Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Glenn Branca's music mixing classicism and minimalism, sophistication and rawness; the futuristic tongue-in-cheek moral fables of multi-media artist Laurie Anderson; the strange otherworldly theatrical warblings of Meredith Monk; the stage productions of Robert Wilson. And then there was the punk explosion. Though musical and spiritual precursors of punk can be seen in the Beatles' riotous early Hamburg performances, in 1960s American garage/garbage rock, in the Velvet Underground, the New York Dolls, MC5, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, Lennon's Plastic Ono Band, and even King Crimson ("Schizoid Man" and much of KC III), punk rock proper (and the lighter, more melodic and danceable new wave) came down like an avalanche in 1975-1977 and the following years with Patti Smith, the Ramones, Talking Heads, and Television leading the way in New York City. Fripp's friend Brian Eno was in New York a great deal from 1978 to 1980, producing Talking Heads, Devo, and compiling the punk anthology *No New York.*

Without rehashing the millions of words that have been written on the meaning of the punk movement in the U.S.A. and the U.K., I might say here simply that punk was, among many

other things, a repudiation of the values, styles, and tastes of the corporate music industry: punk was putting music back in the hands of the people, at least in the movement's early stages. The early punk and new wave bands were intent on slaying the establishment-corporation-Goliath-dinosaur; and to Robert Fripp, the prototypical punk band seemed to represent something close to the "small, mobile, independent, intelligent unit" he had prophesied in 1974.

Downtown New York around 1977 was in artistic/musical ferment characterized by a fluid mixing of genres, forms, and media, as yet mostly untainted by the commercial cynicism and big-bucks mentality that had toppled many musicians of rock's first three generations (1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s). Fripp was drawn to this center of activity as a hunk of red iron ore to a magnet. He was determined, moreover, not to play the role of one of the grand old men of rock, not to entertain any illusions of self-importance, not to indulge in any of the trappings of the star's lifestyle. To ground himself firmly in reality, he drew up three personal rules for living in New York: he would use only public transportation, do his own laundry, and do his own grocery shopping.

Settling into a loft in the Bowery, two blocks away from CBGB, Fripp surveyed the cultural jungle scenery as a prelude to beginning a new phase of work, although it would still be a while before he would officially come out of retirement. Although little is known about his day-to-day movements in New York in 1977, it was during June of that year that what Fripp has called his "own work" with the tape-loop-delay system, or Frippertronics, began. Fripp formally defined Frippertronics in 1980 as "that musical experience resulting at the interstice of Robert Fripp and a small, mobile and appropriate level of technology, vis. his guitar, Frippelboard [effects pedal board] and two Revoxes [reel-to-reel tape recorders]."

The musical uses to which Frippertronics were put will be noted and elaborated on in due course, but for the moment the image to dwell upon is that of Robert Fripp experimenting with and fine-tuning the Frippertronics process in the summer of 1977, in his New York loft and occasionally in actual studios. It was around this time that he began saving particular Frippertronics improvisations on tape that would pop up later on his solo album, *Exposure* – for instance "Water Music II," recorded in July 1977 at the House of Music in New Jersey.

With David Bowie

On numerous occasions Fripp has told with relish the story of how, in late July 1977, David Bowie and Brian Eno coaxed him out of quiescence. One version goes like this: "I was in New York and I got a phone call one Saturday night: 'Hello, it's Brian. I'm here in Berlin with David. Hold on, I'll hand you over.' So Mr. B. came on the line and said, 'We tried playing guitars ourselves; it's not working. Do you think you can come in and play some burning rock'n'roll guitar?' I said, 'Well, I haven't really played guitar for three years ... but I'll have a go!'" *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)*

At Bowie's "*Heroes*" sessions in Berlin, Fripp was able to open up musically once more. He enjoyed the freedom Bowie gave him: Bowie would roll a tape he'd been working on, and Fripp would simply ad lib straight over the top, with little or no premeditation or planning. The first song Fripp played on was "Beauty and the Beast," the album's opener; Fripp describes his contribution as "a creative high spot" for him – "I had an opportunity to be what I was with a guitar." *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Run through Eno's "sky saw" treatments, which lend them a sort of digital-age wah-wah sonority, Fripp's guitar lines seethe with educated rock primitivism – too bad they weren't mixed louder. A different, magisterially restrained Fripp appears on the title track, "Heroes": here the guitarist makes maximum use of a minimalistic handful of notes,

providing a melancholy ostinato against which Bowie's vocal posturings unfold in all their desperate glory.

"*Heroes*" occupies a special place in David Bowie's musical development: the album's B side in particular shows the chameleon-like poseur at the height of his experimental musical tendencies – the instrumental pieces "Sense of Doubt," "Moss Garden," and "Neukoln" being among the most *compositionally* interesting pieces he has ever produced. Rock music is only partly about musical composition, of course, and in subsequent work Bowie was to lapse back into more familiar musical territory. Fripp later contributed guitar parts to Bowie's "Scary Monsters" and "Fashion." In 1987 Fripp said, "The solo on Bowie's 'Fashion' happened at 10:30 in the morning after a long drive back from Leeds gigging with The League of Gentlemen. There's nothing you feel less like in the world than turning out a burning solo – fiery rock and roll at 10:30 in the morning – just out of a truck. But it doesn't matter much how you feel, you just get on with it." *(Diliberto 1987, 50)*

In Allan Jones's entertaining *Melody Maker* interview from 1979, Fripp expounded on what he perceived as the similarities between himself, Bowie, and Eno. This trio of rock renegades, according to Fripp, were of similar age and "more or less working-class backgrounds." They were all keen self-promoters. But at the same time, "each of us finds it difficult to accept the responsibility of having feelings. So we tend to work toward cerebration and bodily involvement rather than the exposure of one's feelings." *(Jones 1979, 60)*

With Daryl Hall

Immediately after his work with Bowie and Eno in Berlin, Fripp deepened his involvement in the music industry by undertaking to produce a solo album for Daryl Hall of Hall and Oates, the pop/rock/R&B duo that in the mid-1970s helped define the "Philadelphia sound." In 1976 Hall and Oates had a string of hits with "She's Gone," "Sara Smile," and "Rich Girl." David Bowie, of course, had flirted with the Philadelphia phenomenon, having recorded the double live album *David Live* in Philly in 1974, and having cut 1975's *Young Americans* in that city's Sigma Sound Studios. "Fame," from *Young Americans*, was Bowie's first number one hit in the States – co-written by Bowie, John Lennon, and guitarist Carlos Alomar, the song stood for years as a paradigm of white disco music.

Sacred Songs, the 1977 Hall/Fripp collaboration, however, represented a major departure from the commercial white soul style for the Philadelphia-born Hall. So different from the Hall & Oates sound was it that RCA records and Hall's personal manager decided against putting it out. Fripp proceeded to wage a protracted battle for the album's release, distributing tapes to industry contacts and urging people to write letters to the president of RCA. *Sacred Songs* eventually came out in 1979 – a bittersweet triumph for Fripp, who had originally conceived the album as part of a grand trilogy, the other parts being the Peter Gabriel's Fripp-produced second solo album and Fripp's own "Exposure." In 1979, Fripp opined that "Had *Sacred Songs* been released when it was made, it would have put Daryl in a different category, with the Bowies and the Enos. Coming out now, it couldn't have the same impact." *(Holden 1980, 20)* (There will be more to say on Fripp's planned triology in the section on *Exposure* below.)

Hall and Fripp had met in Toronto in September 1974. In spite of their very different musical backgrounds, they hit it off personally and admired each others' approach to music; from the beginning of their relationship they discussed the possibility of working together. In August 1977 Hall called Fripp from New York's Hit Factory studios to ask if he would come in and put

down some guitar lines. Fresh from the Bowie/Eno sessions in Berlin, Fripp warmed to the task with such enthusiasm that he was immediately made producer.

Both Hall and Fripp recall the sessions fondly. Fripp called the situation "a beautiful working experience," *(Jones 1979A, 20)* and waxed on the quality and honesty of Hall's songs. He also offered a typically Frippian compliment, saying "Hall is the first singer I've met who can sing anything at all the way I ask him." *(Holden 1980, 20)* For Hall it was a refreshing experience: "I have never made music as easily as I did with Robert." Commenting on what had come to seem to him the "cold and sterile" Philadelphia veneer of Hall and Oates's studio efforts, Hall stressed the artistic freedom he felt in the *Sacred Songs* sessions, saying that Fripp and he were able to "achieve a very spontaneous sound." *(Orme 1977, 29)*

According to Hall, *Sacred Songs* "is mostly me and Robert. We did the basic rhythm tracks, me on piano and Robert on guitar, and then Caleb [Quaye, guitar], Roger [Pope, drums] and Kenny [Passarelli, bass] came along and played." *(Orme 1977, 29)* The album contains moments of gentle tenderness, for instance the inexpressibly melancholy electric piano/Frippertronics duet in "The Farther Away I Am." Other song types include soulful, economically scored ballads and straight-ahead rock and roll. Fripp's *audio verite* approach to production values continued: little or no artificial reverb on the vocals, drums that sound like real drums, true-to-life dynamic range and stereo balance, and an overall band sound that's brilliant if not quite brittle, dry if not quite parched.

A full critical appraisal of *Sacred Songs* would have to take into detailed account the lyrics, the different song types, Hall's prodigious if mannered vocal gymnastics and other factors. While passing on such an appraisal, I would point out that the album's most significant musical innovation is its integration of Frippertronics into an assortment of rock styles. At the time of its making, *Sacred Songs* represented the first recorded use of Frippertronics, and the eerie, haunting results can make one's hair stand on end, notably on Side One's suite, "Babs and Babs – Urban Landscape – NYCNY." Hall put it aptly when he said, "When he plays it sounds like the universe crying." *(Orme 1977, 29)*

With his work on Hall's *Sacred Songs* album in late 1977, Fripp's involvement with the music industry picked up momentum, and it was only a matter of time before he would officially acknowledge that he had come out of retirement. In November, he laid down a track for the song "Exposure" at Relight Studios. Between January 1978 and January 1979 he worked on the recording and mixing of the album *Exposure* at New York's Hit Factory.

At the Kitchen

On Sunday, February 5, 1978, Fripp made his first official solo appearance in over three years, at the Kitchen in Soho: this was also the first time he used the name "Frippertronics" for his tape-delay system. The concert came about almost by accident: originally Fripp and Joanna Walton had intended to give an intimate performance for invited friends in Walton's apartment; evidently they feared it might get too noisy, and moved the event to the Kitchen. *(Liner notes to* GSQ/UHM*)*

The concert was written up in the *Village Voice* by John Piccarella, who describes the atmosphere of anticipation, long lines of people waiting to get in wrapped around the block in the cold. Fripp, perhaps wishing to defuse some of his own anxiety as well as to brace the audience for some very un-King-Crimsonish music, began by comparing his new music to intimate "salon" music; he reportedly "reserved the right to be boring and unintelligent." *(Piccarella 1978, 54)*

The sound, if not the ineffable presence and ambiance, of this event has been preserved on a two-LP bootleg, *Pleasures in Pieces.* This curious artifact contains five Frippertronics pieces, starkly titled "The First," "The Second," "The Third," "The Fourth," and "The Fifth," as well as a text-music piece by Walton, Fripp, and others, which functioned as an interlude between two Frippertronic sets. Piccarella described Walton's piece as follows: "A taped series of quotations from linguistic philosophers was rendered both sensible and ridiculous by a series of silent physical performances. 'Oblique Strategies,' the set of directional cards written by Eno and Peter Schmidt, were circulated among several performers whose movements were, presumably, improvised according to the cards presented. One woman wrote on a large screen what appeared to be transcriptions, literal or otherwise, of the words on the cards ..." *(Piccarella 1978, 56)*

The Frippertronics improvisations from this concert are among the very finest I have heard, quite outstripping similar efforts on *Let the Power Fall* and other records. Particularly noteworthy are the almost constant changes of texture, from drone-based to melodic/motivic to harmonic, so that the overall mass of sound, though formed out of almost endless repetition of fragments, tends to develop significantly from one minute to the next. Fripp's potential for seemingly unending flights of melodic imagination is nowhere more evident. From a musician's point of view, I find Fripp's control of mode and key in these pieces masterful. "The First," for instance, begins with staccato points outlining the F-major triad; a short melodic riff C-D*b*-E*b* introduces a menace of F-minor modality; before long, the note G*b* darkly plays against the prevailing F tonic; A and A*b* make explicit the tension between major and minor; eventually, after many ambiguities and modal excursions, the music slides effortlessly into B*b* major, and later into G*b* major.

Reading through certain pieces in Bach's late monument to strict polyphony, *The Art of the Fugue*, at the keyboard, I have a vision that the Baroque master was in effect thinking in several keys at once, that the nominal tonic of D minor is expanded to embrace a whole system or complex of closely-related keys – A minor, F major, E minor, G, C, and so on – which magically cohere to form one unified super-key or super-mode through which Bach leads his lines with effortless grace. Something similar happens in Frippertronics from time to time, Frippertronics, like fugue, being an art-form of (technological) imitative polyphony. In less technical language (though what is music theory if not a language of the spirit?), Piccarella summed up Fripp's Kitchen soloing as "dazzling, wandering up and down scales like John Coltrane, bending and screaming atonalities like Schoenberg gone punk. He warps notes into imaginary territory the way television spills electrons into an image." *(Piccarella 1978, 56)*

The Drive to 1981

By September 11, 1978, Fripp considered himself prepared to launch a new phase of his career. On that date he began what he dubbed "The Drive to 1981," which he was to describe as "A campaign on three levels: firstly, in the marketplace but not governed by the values of the marketplace; secondly, as a means of examining and presenting a number of ideas which are close to my heart; thirdly, as a personal discipline." *(Liner notes to* God Save the Queen*)* The end of the Drive to 1981 was timed to coincide with an event of astrological significance, an alignment of the planets to take place on September 11, 1981, at which time, Fripp evidently believed, mankind was in for an awakening of apocalyptic import. *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

In concrete terms, the three-year Drive to 1981 spanned a number of projects: *Exposure*; the 1979 Frippertronics tour and the Frippertronic recordings *Let the Power Fall* and *God Save*

the Queen/Under Heavy Manners ("Discotronics"); the League of Gentlemen tours (1980) and *The League of Gentlemen* album; the formation of King Crimson IV (Spring 1981); an extensive series of articles written by Fripp for *Musician, Player and Listener* (later simply *Musician*) magazine, beginning in January 1980; and miscellaneous session and production work, including producing "The Roches" 1978 debut album (Fripp also performed live with the Roches from time to time and produced their 1982 album *Keep On Doing*) and sessions with the Screamers, Blondie, violinist Walter Steding, and Janis Ian. Not bad for three years of work.

Exposure

Exposure's extensive liner notes begin with Fripp's comment, "This album was originally conceived as the third part of an MOR trilogy with Daryl Hall's solo album 'Sacred Songs' and Peter Gabriel II both of which I produced and to which I contributed. With the non-release of 'Sacred Songs' and the delay by dinosaurs of this album it is impossible to convey the sense which I had intended." Fripp goes on to say that the original trilogy will be replaced by a new one all by him: "Exposure," "Frippertronics," and "Discotronics."

Having pondered for some years what Fripp's original "intent" might have been with the Hall-Gabriel-*Exposure* trilogy, I would guess that it had something to do with a concept of a fluid collective music-making situation: three musicians working on each others' albums, sharing songwriting and arrangement duties, the result being three different yet recognizably parallel musical statements – in short, something similar to the King Crimson idea as it had evolved in 1969 and the early 1970s, though without the obligation of presenting the collective to the public as an actual band.

Fripp offered another angle on his intent: "What I was trying to do in the original trilogy was to investigate the 'pop song' as a means of expression ... I think it's a supreme discipline to know that you have three to four minutes to get together all your lost emotions and find words of one syllable or less to put forward all your ideas. It's a discipline of form that I don't think is cheap or shoddy." *(Jones 1979A, 60)*

As we have seen, a couple of *Exposure*'s tracks go back to 1977, but real work on the album began at the Hit Factory in New York in January 1978. By August Fripp had effectively finished the album; Daryl Hall had sung on most of the songs. In September, while already in the process of mastering the record, Fripp was confronted with contractual problems that prevented Hall from appearing on *Exposure* in such a prominent role. Hall would be allowed to sing on only two tracks, and this meant that much of *Exposure* would have to be re-made. Fripp recalls, "I was thoroughly demoralized and depressed. My life was completely knocked askew." *(Jones 1979A, 60)*

Fripp responded to the crisis by calling up his old friend Peter Hammill, who agreed to fly to New York and sing for *Exposure*; Hammill appears on "You Burn Me Up I'm a Cigarette," "Disengage," and "Chicago." Plans to have Blondie's Deborah Harry sing a version of Donna Summers' "I Feel Love" were nixed by Chrysalis Records. But by hook or by crook, Fripp managed to finish the revamped *Exposure* by January 1979, and the album was released later that year. Fripp's original title for *Exposure* had been *The Last of the Great New York Heart-Throbs*, and he had gone so far as to have himself photographed for the album cover with the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. On the album that was eventually released, we see a serious and dapper Fripp, looking tight-lipped and intensely straight at the camera, clean-shaven and under a head of hair cut sharply new-wave style by Mary Lou Green (in whose New York salon Fripp would

sometimes set up his tape decks and engage customers in "Barbertronics.") Into the disc itself was impressed the inscription "1981 is the Year of the Fripp."

• • •

EXPOSURE

• Robert Fripp: guitar and Frippertronics

• Barry Andrews (formerly of XTC): keyboards

• Phil Collins: drums

• Peter Hammill: vocals

• Daryl Hall: vocals

• Peter Gabriel: vocals and piano

• Brian Eno: synthesizer

• Tony Levin: bass

• Terre Roche: vocals

• Jerry Marotta: drums

• Sid McGinness: guitar

• Narada Michael Walden: drums

Exposure has eight tracks on Side One and nine on Side Two – decidedly a gesture against the Crimsoid/progressive rock tendency toward musical statements of interminably epic proportions. But taken as a whole, *Exposure* has the effect of a collage illuminating Fripp's diverse musical and non-musical preoccupations in 1978: it is, as Fripp himself said in 1979, "a psychological autobiography about what caused me to leave the music business and what happened while I was out of it and coming back into it amid total confusion." *(Fricke 1979, 25)* The collage-effect is heightened by the frequent splicing-in of bits of conversation, radio broadcasts, neighbors' arguments, lectures by spiritual leaders, *concrete* sounds, breathing noises, even an interview Fripp conducted with his mother Mrs. Edith Fripp on the subject of his toilet training.

Exposure is a synthesis of styles and ideas, and a concept album to boot. Fripp himself was proud of and pleased with his achievement: in 1979 he said *Exposure* "continues to surprise me in the sense that it's so good ... it works so *completely*." Whether history will endorse Fripp's assessment that *Exposure* was, in 1979, "in terms of its genre, conceivably the best record in the past five years, perhaps longer," we should probably let history itself decide. *(Jones 1979A, 60)* We can acknowledge the brilliance of the record's execution and the spirit of innovation that pervades the work; but one problem with calling it the best record in its genre lies in its very uniqueness. When something creates a category for itself, does it belong to any "genre"? And *Exposure* is, if anything, impossible to classify – perhaps we could call it Fripp's *Sergeant Pepper* ...

Side One

1. PREFACE (Fripp). Like *Sergeant Pepper*, *Exposure* begins with a bit of *musique concrete*, that is, sounds taken from real life. In the midst of muted conversations at a Greenwich Village falafel restaurant, we hear an earnest Brian Eno saying, "Uh – can I play you – um –

some of the new things I've been doing, which I think could be commercial." A few gentle dissonant vocal chords, the voice of an engineer calling for another take – a phone rings – footsteps – the phone keeps ringing – the phone is picked up – over the phone we hear a series of fast electric guitar chords – which lead straight into ...

2. YOU BURN ME UP I'M A CIGARETTE (Words by Fripp; music by Hall and Fripp). Hammill agreeably spits out a rare complete set of song lyrics by Fripp, a curious mixture of pop banalities ("You hold my hand I begin to sweat / You make me nervous") with intellectual-sounding multisyllabicisms ("Strategic interaction irreducible fraction / Terminal inaction and a bitter hostile faction"). Does it work? I suppose it depends on whether the listener can appreciate the spectacle of Robert Fripp parodying himself. The music is punk-modified blues. In the middle is an indecipherable recording of the Shivapuri Baba, holy man of Nepal who was reportedly 137 years old when the tape was made (he died two tears later). He is saying, "Think of God alone. Dismiss every other thought from your mind and you will see God."

3. BREATHLESS (Fripp). This instrumental, featuring fine drumming by Walden, recalls the hard-hitting artistic heavy metal of King Crimson III in the *Red* period, overlaid with Frippertronics. Fripp called *Exposure* "my most recent attempt to 'tweak' with rock and roll, working with the possibility of extending its vocabulary and its capacity for handling a wider range of experiences." In line with this goal, "Breathless" is a study in rhythm and exotic tonality. In Fripp's own analysis, "The main theme is in 7/4, the middle section is in 3/3 plus 3/8 with the guitar in 9/8 over the top of it, but it's still identifiably rock and roll ... " On the other hand, "If one were to score it for string quartet it wouldn't sound inappropriate at all." *(Garbarini 1979, 31)*

4. DISENGAGE (Words by Walton; music by Fripp and Hammill). Opens with some long minor-mode Frippertronic tones laid over the toilet training interview with Fripp's mother, all I can make out is her saying repeatedly, "You never remember", then slams into more heavy metal. The evocative words by Walton and the ferocity of Hammill's delivery almost make up for the lack of a real melody. Then again, lack of a real melody is due to the way the song was made: Fripp had made the backing tracks, then stuck a lyric sheet in front of Hammill and said, "Sing." This is not so much songwriting as collaborative layering, a criticism that, in the following chapter, I will not hesitate to level against a number of songs with Adrian Belew lyrics and vocals from the King Crimson IV period. (It is only fair to report that Michael Bloom, in his *Rolling Stone* review of *Exposure*, had a different view of the matter: Bloom called the vocal improvisations by Hall, Gabriel, Hammill, and Roche *Exposure*'s most avant-garde idea, and it had its successes: the genuine tenderness in Roche's 'Mary' and Hammill's furious realization of 'Disengage' might never have happened in conventional sessions." *[Bloom 1979, 56]* I would counter only by saying that "music," in one specific sense of the word, can be improvised, but "composition," in another specific sense, cannot; I shall return to this point in the final chapter of this book.)

5. NORTH STAR (Words by Walton; music by Fripp and Hall). Hall's white-soul vocalizations, Fripp's gentle seventh chords, and Walton's tender lyrics gel into a stylized ballad.

6. CHICAGO (Words by Walton; music by Fripp and Hall). Dark blues with surrealistic Frippertronic overlays.

7. NY3 (Fripp). The voices in this rather terrifying piece of urban *audio verite* were taped by Fripp one night from his Manhattan apartment. His neighbors' violent argument is counterpointed with an angry rock romp at an impossibly fast tempo in some impossibly arcane

meter (Jon Pareles in the *Village Voice* says it's 17/8 – he also points out the riff lifted from Hendrix's "Foxy Lady"). *(Pareles 1979, 49)*

8. MARY (Words by Joanna Walton; music by Fripp and Hall). Terre Roche delivers a characteristically innocent yet wounded vocal. (This was one of the songs which Daryl Hall sang on the original, unreleased *Exposure*; Roche learned the vocal part by listening to Hall's improvised versions.)

Side Two

1. EXPOSURE (Fripp and Gabriel). A miniature collage all unto itself, the title track integrates Frippertronics; Roche screaming out the word "Exposure" Yoko Ono style while Gabriel spells it out letter by letter; a tape loop of Bennett saying "It is impossible to achieve the aim without suffering"; and a one-chord rock rhythm section percolating underneath it all. (A different version of this song appeared on Gabriel's 1978 Fripp-produced solo album.)

2. HAADEN TWO (Fripp). More spoken quotations (some even played backwards) from a variety of sources over what Eno, in one of the quotations, calls an "incredibly dismal, pathetic chord sequence."

3. URBAN LANDSCAPE (Fripp). Brooding, menacing long-tone Frippertronics. Major and minor modes sound simultaneously ... leads directly into ...

4. I MAY NOT HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF ME BUT I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOU (Words by Walton; music by Fripp). In what had by now become one of Fripp's more irritating mannerisms, the opening chord slams the head of the unsuspecting listener, who had been lulled into a state of somnambulent profundity by the preceding Frippertronics. I have concluded only that the man *wants* to irritate you – and that if you're lucky, you might take that irritation as a sign of waking up. This frenetic song leads into ...

5. FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS TO THE I.A.C.E. SHERBORNE HOUSE (Bennett). What one writer reports is "a forty-minute J.G. Bennett lecture condensed to three seconds by raising it 6,500 octaves." *(Fricke 1979, 25)* This description makes little acoustical sense to me, since raising any humanly audible sound by more than eleven octaves suffices to take it completely out of the range of human hearing. Yet I am prepared to believe that Fripp did indeed condense the Bennett lecture by some electro-acoustical-mechanical means. This seems an apt place to report that according to Fripp, Bennett's wife believed Bennett himself would have been "very pleased" with *Exposure*; Bennett had been captivated by Jimi Hendrix and the Isle of Wight festival in 1970, and had thought that rock music exhibited the "essence of a place more real than life itself." *(Watts 1980, 22)*

6. WATER MUSIC I (Words by Bennett; music by Fripp). Over indescribably poignant Frippertronics, Bennett prophecies global apocalypse and natural disasters ... leads straight into ...

7. HERE COMES THE FLOOD (Gabriel). Gabriel, accompanied only by acoustic piano, with occasional delicate Eno synthesizer and Frippertronics, delivers a simultaneously heartbreaking and terrifying reading of a song he had originally recorded for his first solo album in a heavier rock arrangement.

8. WATER MUSIC II (Fripp). Frippertronics – and yes, you can surely see the slow sad sweeping of ocean swells surrounding the shore.

9. POSTSCRIPT (Fripp). After the last seaside sibilants have died away, we hear friendly Eno in the falafel restaurant once more: "So the whole story is completely untrue – a big hoax –

ha ha ha," he chuckles gently. "big hoax – heh heh heh" is repeated/looped a few times, loses fidelity; and then the phone is hung up and the footsteps walk away.

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Being the great Robert Fripp's first major release since 1974, *Exposure* was greeted with a deluge of attention in the rock press. Jon Pareles noted the way the Frippertronics sound was used to unify the album's almost perversely disparate song styles. Wrote Pareles in the *Village Voice*: "The self-indulgence, the pomposity, the shilling for Bennett, even [Fripp's] referring to himself in the third person (a Gurdjieff-inspired exercise) can't mar the delicacy of 'Mary' or the brute force of 'I May Not Have Enough of Me But I've Had Enough of You.'" *(Pareles 1979, 49)* Michael Watts, writing for *Melody Maker*, called *Exposure* "stimulating," revealing "more of Fripp's personality than any record has ... before. A truly original work, it satisfies these head, heart, and hips [sic]." *(Watts 1979, 19)* Tom Carson, in the course of a 1980 *Rolling Stone* review of *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners*, wrote that *Exposure* had "clicked as an amusing grab bag: a portrait of the artist as an intellectual hustler." *(Carson 1980, 56)*

The reviews were not wholly acclamatory, and some were as mystifying as the music itself. Gary Kenton, writing for *Creem*, judged that Fripp hadn't really advanced musically beyond his King Crimson days: "what was interesting, even avant-garde in the late 60's only grates now." *(Kenton 1979, 56.)* (One wonders how well Kenton studied the record or how much he knew about Fripp; he apparently thought it was Fripp singing on "Disengage" and "North Star.") Jim Farber, also writing for *Creem*, ridiculed Fripp's flirtations with "hifalutin'" intellectuality (as allegedly epitomized by Fripp's use of Eno's *Oblique Strategies* in the 1978 Kitchen concert), yet celebrated the return, on *Exposure*, of "those classic Fripp mother-raping guitar lines." *(Farber 1978, 26)* Michael Bloom's *Rolling Stone* review was ambivalent. Bloom held Fripp "the artist" in "considerable respect." He wrote that *Exposure* was "brimming with good ideas and experimental intentions. Regrettably, all the cleverness boils away, and the music seems slapdash and thin – more like a session player's first tentative record than the work of a ten-year-plus veteran of demanding progressive music." *(Bloom 1979, 56)*

When I call *Exposure* to mind from memory and see it/hear it cast across the screen of my awareness, it stands as a masterwork, as an inspired work of art, as a particular apotheosis of rock music, of Western music as a whole, of the late 1970s. This is how it stands in my memory. Putting the record on the turntable and actually *listening* to it, however, induces a somewhat different experience. By around the middle of Side One I invariably wonder what all the fuss is about. I can't keep the beat, all the emotive vocal screaming has me on edge, I hear on the one hand extraordinarily accomplished guitar playing and beat counting, yet the overall sound is just so *irritating* that I wonder whether indeed it is all some kind of cruel hoax. "Mary" restores my confidence in some kind of soul values, and turning to Side Two I am in a somewhat more receptive frame of mind. The first three tracks on Side Two coax me along and beguile me with their minimalistic humor, until "I May Not Have Had Enough" blasts into my now delicate consciousness, shattering any illusions that I am dealing with a musician who harbors any regard whatsoever for conventional standards of beauty or propriety. This is the crisis point: not only is the blast rude, inappropriate, and by now a Fripp cliche, but I have to ask myself exactly what he's trying to accomplish here. Then – miracle of miracles – all that follows is sheer wonder, worlds opening into worlds, musical revelations: Bennett's restrained yet impassioned message, "Water Music I & II" framing Gabriel's "Here Comes the Flood" ("Water Music II," at six minutes and ten seconds, is by far the longest piece on *Exposure* – it was edited down to 4'16" for the remastered, remixed version of the album later released), and finally the "Postscript," in which Eno says yes, maybe it is all a big hoax, and then the phone hangs up, as if the whole

album had been some sort of mediumistic communication from the mysterious cybernetic beyond. It is at the end of the album that memory begins, and thus my impression that we are dealing with a masterwork.

Exposure gels as a whole but not in its individual parts. Fripp doesn't seduce you until the end, by which point if you are not irritated to the point of distraction you are lucky. Fripp makes you work; he doesn't make it easy. And why should he make it easy? There is so much music out there that does. But this brings up another point. I have called *Exposure* Fripp's *Sergeant Pepper*. But *Sergeant Pepper*, along with so many pieces by Mozart, for instance, is consistently beautiful, tuneful, seductive, and beguiling *in addition to* being intellectually irreproachable: you are irresistibly attracted to the sounding surface of the music first, and later, if you are lucky or if you have the requisite background, you begin to understand that a depth of psychological and structural meaning lies below the surface: the music then takes on added dimensions of resonance.

Not so with Fripp, Bartok, or Schoenberg: here, the dissonance of the sounding surface can only drive one away screaming or – if one is lucky – produce in one a sensation of such fantastic melodic intricacy and incomprehensibly complex and self-propulsive rhythm that one develops the patience and the conviction to stick it out and to receive the rare moments of seduction as pure gifts, made all the more valuable for their very rarity.

Music, among other things, is playing with time, rhythm, and meter, which intimately reflect the human sense of existence through motion. *Exposure* contains lessons in time ranging from the straight-ahead blues tunes to the convoluted meters to the condensed Bennett lecture to the duration of the album as a whole, with its framing phone calls. In terms of the frenetically odd-metered songs on *Exposure* being bona fide rock and roll with an expanded vocabulary, Fripp got it partly right; but he was soon to draw back (if temporarily) into a kind of dance music that you could actually tap your foot to, without worrying about intellectual disgrace – with Discotronics and the League of Gentlemen.

Frippertronics: The Idea, the Tour, and the Recordings

I have already discussed several aspects of the Frippertronics idea: the technological set-up whereby two reel-to-reel tape recorders were connected together and to Fripp's electric guitar *(for one of the most detailed technical descriptions of the system, see Mulhern 1986, 90-91)*; the musical style, that is, the potential for creatively shaping ever-fluctuating masses of sound in real time, ordinarily upon a tonal, pandiatonic, modal, or multi-modal basis; and the various uses of Frippertronics – as music performed solo, or as one timbral/structural element within a more conventional song, or as a "thematic sound" used to unify a large musical collage such as *Exposure*.

The Frippertronics tour of 1979 was an anti-tour by an anti-rock-star; or to put it the way Fripp frequently did, it represented deliberate work in the marketplace against the values of the marketplace. The tour involved seventy-two performances between April 5 and August 19, in Canada, England, Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, and the United States. The sole performer was Fripp with his hardware; and the chosen locations were typically small clubs, restaurants, art galleries, record shops, radio station studios, museums, record company offices, and even the occasional pizza parlor. The Frippertronics tour was the small, mobile, intelligent unit in action.

The motto or theme of the tour was "human contact." *(Jones 1979A, 60)* Fripp would be able to *see* the audience for a change; they would be able to watch him up close and personal, to become an active, perceptive, and expressive part of the musical process, to ask questions and make comments. The whole tour was designed as a protest against the corporate-industry-dinosauric approach to rock performance and marketing. Since most of Fripp's appearances were non-paying engagements, the tour lost money – about $25,000 by one estimation, which was still, according to Fripp, only about one-eighth the normal loss for a rock tour by a normal band. Bands undertake tours to promote record sales, and indeed Fripp claimed that the Frippertronics tour boosted sales of *Exposure* to twice the number – some 78,000 units sold during the tour – Polydor had expected to sell. Fripp rejected the idea that massive advertising, promotion, and touring budgets were needed to sell records. Furthermore, he was against such mammoth budgets from an ethical point of view: "With real tour support, there would be pressure to behave as people with that kind of budget are expected to." *(Kirk 1979B, 59) Exposure* sold unexpectedly well, with little if any play on commercial radio.

(As a parenthetical note, it might be recalled that one of Fripp's musical heroes, Igor Stravinsky, in 1917 at the age of thirty-five, planned to undertake a small, mobile, intelligent tour of Switzerland, performing his small theater piece *L'Histoire du soldat* with a handful of fellow-musicians. The music was a jaunty mixture of popular, dance, jazz, and neo-classical styles. The tour did not take place because following the premiere in Lausanne, a number of the performers came down with a bad case of flu. I suppose the analogy could be extended still further: Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1912) had culminated a period of redefining the rhythmic and harmonic vocabulary of ballet music, just as King Crimson's *Red* did for rock. Fripp was thirty-three at the time of the Frippertronics tour.)

The Frippertronics tour became a vehicle for a grass-roots spreading of Fripp's ideas. A typical day in America might involve doing four hours of interviews and one or two improvised performances in record shops. Fripp regarded the interviews "as being in some senses more important than the music I was playing." *(DeCurtis 1984, 20)*

Fripp would say the darndest things to his miniature audiences, he would lecture ironically on the music business, or speak passionately about the nature of creative listening to music, or cooly display his erudition, or play the part of a stand-up comic. Since so much of what he said, however, seemed to hinge on the way he said it – timing, body language, tone of voice, facial expression, rhetorical tricks of the trade – few of the many concert reviews that were duly written up were able to capture the man's elusive presence in any significant way. This, of course, is precisely the way Fripp must have wanted it.

As reported in *Variety*, at the July Frippertronics dates at Madame Wong's in Los Angeles,

> Fripp's explanations of the system's technology ... and the underlying world-view embodied in it were as mind-boggling and hypnotic as the musical performance itself, despite some problems in audience deportment, born of an obvious failure to fully grasp the totality of his cosmology. Fripp's concepts, while consummately on target, are so antithetical to the ways in which audiences have come to expect music will be presented – and the ways in which the music industry likes to serve it up – that there are bound to be those who miss the point. Nevertheless, for the vast majority of those on hand who were able to drop their preconceptions about the nature of the performer-audience relationship, the experience was total. *(Kirk 1979A, 78)*

Frippertronics appearances at locations such as London's Pizza Express at Notting Hill Gate created unique dilemmas for the audience: as Richard Williams pondered, "Should one feel bad about ordering an American Hot with mozzarella salad and a flask of Chianti while a famous rock star is performing? Fripp's discretion provided a firm assurance that any response was the right one." *(Williams 1979, 40)* As Allan Jones reviewing for *Melody Maker* the April 26 Virgin Records Shop gig in London, reported, Fripp's very proximity to his audience enable them to see exactly what he was doing with the controls on the tape decks, the foot pedals, and so on – it was almost as though one could see what Fripp was thinking, as though one could take part in the decisions being made. Jones concluded that "the entire process of making music was thus demystified." At some point, the audience-performer relationship becomes a closed loop, and Jones realized that a Frippertronics audience might find themselves actually "influencing the course and shape of the music" Fripp was playing. *(Jones 1979B, 40)*

Jones further remarked on Fripp's air of confidence and good humor, how easily and good-naturedly he bore with the background conversations, giggles, and intentional disruptions (such as a loud fart). After the music, Fripp "held the majority quite spellbound" explaining the idea of the small, mobile, intelligent unit and his forebodings of imminent apocalypse, but also "elaborating hilariously on the Drive to 1981 and the subsequent Decline into 1984." *(Jones 1978B, 40)*

There probably was no "typical" Frippertronics concert, and this was precisely the point: each event was shaped by the individuality of the location, time of day, character of the audience, and frame of mind of the performer. At some concerts where admission was charged, as at the Kitchen gigs in June, Fripp included a cassette of a Bennett lecture in the price of admission. Such actions, and Fripp's own frequent references to matters of the Fourth Way, led to inevitable reactions and accusations: Fripp was trying to propagandize, he had been brainwashed by Gurdjieffian mysticism, and so on. (Not that Fripp's accusers, in the reviews I have read, bothered to find out and explain just exactly who Gurdjieff was.)

The more balanced reviewers – that is, those who felt no need to entertain their readers with loud proclamations of the superiority of the sex-drugs-rock and roll (and maybe politics) myth over music that was contemplative and intelligent – were receptive to varying degrees. Jon Pareles, reviewing *Exposure* and a 1979 Kitchen concert, wrote, in what was nonetheless a fairly positive appraisal of Fripp's *music*, "The expansion of Fripp's own slavish cult isn't exactly a prospect I relish, but he's at least as deserving as Ted Nugent and fully entitled to hype himself." *(Pareles 1979)*

The Frippertronics idea left behind – as residue, distillate, precipitation, artifact – one and a half officially released albums, several small-scale pieces that appeared here and there, and a smattering of illicitly recorded and distributed bootlegs. Of the bootlegs, made against Fripp's repeatedly expressed wishes, and being contrary to the whole spirit of the Frippertronics tour, we shall say little. The album and a half are *Let the Power Fall* (1981) and the *God Save the Queen* side of *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners* (the other side will be considered in the following section on Discotronics). The small-scale pieces include the likes of "Night I & II: Urban Landscapes," which came out on *Recorder Three*, a magazine/record published in Bristol in 1981 which also contained one of the most revealing interviews with Fripp I have seen.

Fripp had originally planned a trio of albums: *Exposure*, "Frippertronics," and "Discotronics." Due to the delay of *Exposure*'s release, and to other factors not entirely clear, he proceeded to condense the latter two albums into one, calling it *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners*, with the Frippertronics and Discotronics neatly segregated on separate sides. In the liner notes, written on January 4, 1980, at his office in Wimborne, Dorset (which he was by

now calling “Fripp World Headquarters”), Fripp outlined the history and philosophy of Frippertronics and the Drive to 1981. Here he offered perhaps his most succinct summary of the ways the Frippertronics tour attempted to counter the “trend to idiocy” in rock performance (the trend characterized by “the escalation in the size of rock events, ... the general acceptance of rock music as spectator sport, ... [and] the vampiric relationship between audience and performer”): Frippertronics audiences would be limited in size (ten to 250), the audience would be invited “to listen actively which places the listeners in a position of equal responsibility with the performer,” and the performer and audience would try to decline “to humour each other’s mutual pretensions, egocentricities and conceits.” In the liner notes Fripp also points out that he had originally intended to call the album “Music for Sports,” and that in the spirit of that title, the music could be used either “as an accompaniment for a wide range of healthy activities or as a field for active listening.”

The three improvisations on *God Save the Queen* are taken from two Frippertronics performances in Berkeley, California, on July 30, 1979. The title track is an improvisation based on the British national anthem, which Fripp supplied when a member of the audience requested a rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” – the tune Jimi Hendrix had used as the basis of an extraordinary flight of imagination at the Woodstock festival.

Frippertronics was first and foremost a live experience; it is thus perhaps not difficult to understand the bafflement of rock reviewers who, confronted with the mere sound of the music out of its natural habitat, heaped upon it such characterizations as “muzak/ambient/mood music ... simply the ultimate sleep inducer with its cotton-candy strata of melody and chords.” *(Hadley 1980)* Lester Bangs, who, after all, was Lester Bangs, called Fripp’s philosophizing liner notes “stuffy, self-righteous, and self-contradictory”; the Frippertronics itself he found “pleasant” enough as background music, though as for active listening, Bangs commented, “preferably while stoned, I say, as you probably will too.” *(Bangs 1980)* Tom Carson did take it upon himself to blast Fripp’s “mandarin jargon about ‘small, mobile, intelligent units’“ as amounting to “a repellent brand of technocratic elitism” that set “new standards in art-rock pomposity,” but went on to characterize *God Save the Queen’s* music as “striking in a cryptic, deliberately elliptical way.” *(Carson 1980, 56)*

In 1981 *Let the Power Fall: An Album of Frippertronics*, sort of an official memoir of the 1979 tour, was released. It contained six improvisations (starkly titled “1984,” “1985,” “1986,” 1987,” “1988,” and “1989”), a complete dated list of the tour’s gigs, six paragraphs of densely worded text, and three collections of seven Fripp aphorisms each. By 1981, the lines had been firmly drawn, and for those who felt they had taken stock of what Frippertronics had to offer there was little point in further listening. This perhaps explains the almost complete dearth of reviews, in major music magazines, of *Let the Power Fall.* The only one I have been able to dig up was written by John Diliberto for *Down Beat.* Diliberto called the album “another testament to the versatility of Fripp’s structure and clarity of vision. The opening track, ‘1984,’ is an architectural wonder ... There’s an erroneous tendency to think of Frippertronics as sophisticated background music, but any serious listening to *Let the Power Fall* reveals a highly charged emotional intensity.” *(Diliberto 1982, 34)*

My feeling is that Diliberto was on target in drawing attention to the music’s deeply emotional nature, a depth of emotion married to an intellectual rigor which is evident to anyone with the ears to hear this music on a structural level. There is no doubt that for all Fripp’s reserve, for all his careful gentlemanly concealment of emotional manifestations, he put his heart and soul into his Frippertronics improvisations. Not everyone, raised beyond himself by the spirit of music, is going to jump about the stage in “wild abdomen,” to use Lennon’s phrase *(Lennon, In*

His Own Write); for the introvert like Fripp, the moment of contact may happen quietly. He describes such experiences quietly, as when speaking of a Frippertronics concert that took place on June 16, 1979 at the Washington Ethical Society: "The music itself wasn't very good ('as' music it wasn't very good), but a door definitely opened ... Using a kind of traditional terminology, the Muses were supposedly that level of intelligence responsible for the direction of certain artistic currents or whatever; in a sense there was a Muse present – there was a considerable presence in that room." *(Recorder Three, n.p.)*

Two years later, playing Frippertronics for a benefit concert at a Philadelphia college radio station, Fripp felt something similar: "I was soloing over the Frippertronic loop and I *heard* the next note and played it and *heard* the next note and played it, and I was weeping as I was playing because something was beginning to move." *(Recorder Three, n.p.)* For Fripp, the moral of this story was not the emotion itself, but the new sense of effortlessness – each note presenting itself – that he was just beginning to feel in his music, which he had approached for a long time in a spirit of toil and travail: "I've been going at music for twenty three years, from a person who was wholly unmusical – tone deaf with no sense of rhythm – and now something is beginning to open and I'm 'just' beginning to hear something about the music on the inside, just about." *(Recorder Three, n.p.)*

On a lighter note, in 1987 Fripp recalled how, fifteen years before, Eno had shown him the two-tape-deck system, and how he had instantly had a glimpse of great possibilities: "There it was, a way for one person to make an awful lot of noise. Wonderful!" *(Diliberto 1987, 52)*

"Discotronics": The Idea and its Realizations

It would make a nice neat conceptual closure to say that Frippertronics represented the art-music component of the Drive to 1981 and Discotronics its popular music thrust. But of course it is not quite so simple. Fripp himself would point out the similarities between Frippertronics and commercial Muzak – and Muzak is, if nothing else, the ultimate lowest common denominator in contemporary musical culture. Discotronics, for its part, was far from being solely functional music for dancing; its manifestations were frequently sophisticated enough to be called art, that is, to serve as material for listening for its own sake.

At the head of the liner notes corresponding to the *Under Heavy Manners* side of the *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners* album was a typically Frippelistic pronouncement: "Discotronics is defined as that musical experience resulting at the interstice of Frippertronics and disco." As we have seen, Fripp had been planning an album of Discotronics for some time. But now that it was finally to be released, he drew back from his own terminology. The days of "disco," he seemed to acknowledge in the liner notes, were numbered, and rather than risk the label "Discotronics" becoming quickly dated, Fripp mock-seriously weighed the virtues of such substitute slogans as "'Roscotronics' (that musical experience resulting at the interstice of Frippertronics and any rock idiom to which dancing is likely or feasible)" and "'Dorotronics' (from the label 'Dance Oriented Rock')."

Discotronics, Roscotronics, Dorotronics – whatever it was, it had two primary manifestations: the half-album *Under Heavy Manners* and Fripp's work in 1980 with the League of Gentlemen.

In December 1979 Fripp called Buster Jones (bass), Paul Duskin (drums), and "Absalm el Habib" (David Byrne) into the studios of the Hit Factory in New York to play and sing alongside

loops recorded during the Frippertronics tour. The result was the two long tracks, “Under Heavy Manners” and “The Zero of the Signified,” that comprised *Under Heavy Manners.*

Fripp wrote the lyrics that Byrne inimitably croaked out in “Under Heavy Manners,” a song which indeed is musically nothing more than Frippertronics over a more-or-less disco rhythm section. The words are not so much lyrics as they are a litany of “-isms,” from the familiar (conservatism, liberalism, fascism) to the obscure (cataphatacism, scofistism, theandricism, just to choose three at random, are not in my dictionary – Fripp found them in Vladimir Lossky’s *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*). On the surface, in spite of Byrne’s valiant efforts, “Under Heavy Manners” may appear merely a poor (and irritatingly) academically arcane, imitation of what one critic once called Bob Dylan’s “laundry list poetry,” or of John Lennon’s “God” – another “list” song. And calling attention to the fact that we live in an age of isms is little more than a cliche.

In one interview, however, Fripp amplified the meaning of two key lines: “Remain in hell without despair” and “I am resplendent in divergence.” Beginning with the opinion that “You have to find a way where the language confuses itself to the point where anything can come through,” Fripp related that he had written the first line the morning after having completed a visit in December 1979 to Mount Athos monastery in Cyprus, and that the words were a paraphrase of the moral of a story told by one of the monks. As Fripp describes it:

“One of the Saints was suffering the torments of hell – however one would wish to express it in modern technology – but really going through a bummer and at the end of this particular period of personal turbulence or freak-out or whatever, said, ‘Christ, how could you desert me and leave me with all this nonsense going on?’ and Christ said ‘I didn’t desert you, I was with you through all of it; admiring you work.’ So the advice was to remain in hell without despair. In other words, one learns how to suffer – but the necessary suffering, not the nonsense – and, a lot of my personal life was remaining in hell *with* despair. But I think Sherborne shifted that away you know.” “Under Heavy Manners” is thus “about how far one can go with a process of logical thought and how much is possible through the intellect and it’s only when you go beyond that that something happens. The mind, of course, has its use – a well-ordered mind has its use but the geezer obviously goes through the different possible things he can go through” from politics to religion, “and with the long scream with forty-seven A’s in it ... obviously it’s confused him to the point where he has to go a bit beyond that. And ‘his’ solution is that he’s resplendent in divergence – he’s found a way of working in a different kind of way which goes beyond merely the process of, if you like, subjective meditation.” *(Recorder Three, n.p.)* (The reader who wishes to pursue this further is referred to *The Monk of Mount Athos* by Archimandrite Sofronii, who is the source of the aphorism, “Keep thy mind in hell and despair not,” and whom Fripp met in Cyprus.)

Trivia and not so trivia: “Sunder here navy man” is an anagram of “Under Heavy Manners”, the only actual Fripp coinage in the song is “cleverism,” which ended up being printed under the word “neologism” on the lyric sheet, some of the more obscure words are clumsy English renderings of ecclesiastical Greek, the bells heard in the song were the bells of Wimbourne Minster, recorded through the window of Fripp World H.Q. on a cassette machine, the phrase “Under Heavy Manners” is a reference to police brutality and oppression in the West Indies, “Urizel” is a garbled reference to William Blake’s “Urizen,” the name the poet gave to the jealous and fearful God of the Old Testament, embodied in the oppressive institutions of state and church, and which Fripp called simply “Blake’s personification of the dry intellect.”

“The Zero of the Signified” is a song having to do with aspects of repetition. The technological repetition of the Frippertronics loop contrasts the physical repetition of the solo

guitar part (a very fast phrase repeated for some ten minutes). Furthermore, talking about the piece in an interview, Fripp called attention to two contrasting psycho-philosophical views of repetition. One was Eno's idea that "repetition is a form of change"; Eno had formulated this axiom after having performed LaMonte Young's *X for Harry Flynt* – a performance involving bringing both forearms down on a piano keyboard at regular intervals for an hour. The other was semiologist Roland Barthes' axiom, "To repeat excessively is to enter into loss; this we term the zero of the signified." (Fripp said that he had become interested in the science of signs on account of "being an English person trying to work out my background and what it is that people were telling me.") *(Recorder Three, n.p.)*

The degree to which the uninformed rock listener could enter into Fripp's music at such levels is open to doubt; and not everyone sensed the vivifying humor behind the liner notes' exaggerated intellectual posturing. One critic panned the whole album as "Borotronics." *(Hadley 1980, 41)* Michael Davis in *Creem* called "The Zero of the Signified" "dull. True, you can dance to it but big deal, you can dance to a lot of things, from eggbeaters to washing machines (if you think pogoing to the Ramones at 78 r.p.m. is the ultimate, try getting down to a spin cycle)". *(Davis 1980)*

Under Heavy Manners was a concept album; it was music about dance music (and, as we have seen, about semiotics and the salvation of the soul as well). Its musical dialect was a scruffy pidgin of new wave rock, disco, and Frippertronics vintage late 1979. The attraction and possibilities of such a combination became the focus of much of Fripp's attention in 1980, the year he formed, toured, and recorded with the League of Gentlemen. By the middle of March the band, which had considered calling itself the Rhythm Section, was rehearsing in a fourteenth century lodge near Fripp World H.Q.

By this point, Fripp's extended sojourn in New York was over. Even during his stay in the Big Apple, he had retained a small cottage in Wimbourne. By early 1980, having harkened to the call of an inner voice which said to him one day, "Go to Wimbourne," he had shifted his center of gravity to his home town, where he maintained the official Fripp World H.Q. in a flat above a shop, and where he was able to visit his parents frequently. *(Watts 1980, 22)*

The League of Gentlemen was, as Fripp once put it, "a wonderful little bopping band" *(Mulhern 1986, 103)* that played seventy-seven gigs in England, Europe, and America between April 10 and November 29, 1980, and produced one album. The personnel initially consisted of Fripp, keyboardist Barry Andrews (formerly of XTC, and who had played on *Exposure*), Sara Lee on bass, and Jonny Toobad on drums. Fripp had recruited Lee and Toobad after hearing them play in London in a band called Baby and the Black Spots. If Frippertronics was primarily a music of the mind, with the League of Gentlemen Fripp was interested in a music of the body, music of sexual energy, "energy from the waist down," as he called it. *(Watts 1980, 22)* In another formulation, he said that "The League of Gentlemen works from outside the music inward, while [Frippertronics] works from the inside outwards." He added a remark on social setting: "It is very difficult to play Frippertronics to drunk people at rock'n'roll clubs." *(Dallas 1980)*

For Fripp, the League of Gentlemen represented a sort of musical populism – a populism, however, not of a naive sort, but of a reflected, thoughtful quality. Much of his work with the musicians of King Crimson had involved virtuosity at a self-conscious level, but Fripp had come to be suspicious of displays of artifice for their own sake. He expressed the dilemma in terms of the contrast between competence and ideas: "I've found that musicians who can play 10,000 notes tend to play them, and the 10,000 notes I hear I don't enjoy." *(Watts 1980, 23)* Better to have a limited set of chops and through them to express something of real significance.

Not that the League of Gentlemen were exactly a bunch of slackers. Organist Andrews proved he was equal to the task of balancing Fripp's speedy guitar ostinati with organ counterpoint of complementary dexterity and contrapuntal interest, while Lee and Toobad managed to keep danceable time in the midst of the angular electronic polyphony. In clubs, such as New York's Irving Plaza on June 28, Fripp would introduce the band with some such lingo as the following: "Welcome to the League of Gentlemen. This is another improbable event, full of hazard. We suggest that you listen and dance simultaneously." *(Loder 1980, 60)* As in most new wave dance bands, group rhythm and texture was in, soloing was out; at the Plaza, Fripp took only one solo, over the slashing rhythms of "Thrang Perboral Gozinblux," a piece he was later to use as a study in meter with his Guitar Craft students.

The evo-/devolutionary pattern of King Crimson repeated itself with the League of Gentlemen: on the completion of the U.S. tour on July 22, 1980, after four months of work together, three of which were on the road, Fripp was growing restless and the cohesiveness of the band began to break down. He wrote the following year that after July 22, "The short rehearsals grew shorter and less productive, the recording depressing." *(Fripp 1981B, 40)* A seven-day recording session produced only two pieces, "Heptaparaparshinokh" and "Dislocated." In Manchester on November 23, during the League's final British tour, Jonny Toobad was dismissed from the band; according to Fripp, "his performance was no longer reliable." *(Mulhern 1986, 103)*

Toobad was replaced with drummer Kevin Wilkinson. Driving from Manchester to Liverpool for the next gig, Fripp was depressed and disappointed, and made a decision to form a new band with higher self-imposed standards, this was the moment of genesis of King Crimson IV, to which we shall return in the next chapter. With Wilkinson, the League of Gentlemen played five more British gigs, recorded the bulk of the album *The League of Gentlemen* at Arny's Shack (a recording studio in Dorset), and was laid to rest.

In some respects the album recalls "Exposure," what with the many short tracks, the appearance of taped Bennett quotations, the *concrete* sounds, the "indiscretions", in this case largely fragments of conversational interviews on the subject of rock and roll. Rock and roll, we learn, is a music of physical energy and sexual inspiration; the music on the album, it appears, is set forth to clinch this somewhat less than novel thesis.

But as a listening to "Inductive Resonance" will show, *The League of Gentlemen*, under cover of relatively lightweight new wave dance music, contained some of Fripp's most advanced – or at any rate most difficult – recorded guitar work to date. Here he presented in all its perfection a technique of rapidly flat-picking arpeggiated chord-melodies with a staccato attack. Such a technique is similar to what is called in classical music *style brise* ("broken [chord] style"): "a texture in which melodic lines are subservient to the broken chords and composite rhythms they create," according to the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*. *Style brise* originated in French lute music of the seventeenth century and was taken up by French and German harpsichordists. J.S. Bach brought the technique to a pinnacle of fulfillment with his gloriously mind-bending suites for solo cello – music in which linear melody is so thoroughly suffused with harmonic implications as to make analytic separation of the two impossible.

The broken-chord style is also featured on "Cognitive Dissonance," a miniature lesson in Frippian tonality. (The title refers to a concept developed by psychologist Leon Festinger. In brief, human beings have an innate drive toward consistency; when some particular data we confront is at odds with our beliefs or theories of how the world works, we experience cognitive dissonance.) In "Cognitive Dissonance," the organ presents a harmonic entity based on the augmented triad G*b*-B*b*-D, over drums and bass. Fripp's guitar enters playing a broken G*b*

dominant seventh chord with added flatted third – Fripp's beloved major/minor ambiguity. The harmony shifts systematically to B*b*7 and then to D7, as it were developing the implications in the original augmented chord. Simple and ingenious.

The overall texture of a piece like "Trap," with guitar and organ ripping along a rippling sea of short notes, running through triadic yet sometimes unexpected chord changes, bears a strong surface resemblance to 1970s musical minimalism like Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach.* Several essays in pure synthesizer Frippertronics round out the album.

The highly contrapuntal nature of some of *The League of Gentlemen*'s music – whose direct source for Fripp was more likely Bartok than Bach, and which I find its most stimulating and enduring aspect – was a stumbling block to some reviewers. John Orme, for instance, reviewing the album in *Melody Maker*, wrote that "Logic in the hands of Robert Fripp has become an obsessive strength that folds music like aural origami into complex, neatly-creased shapes, and hinges on the development of a series of almost mathematical ideas, his fingers solving musical equations ... Pocket calculators will be making music like this before Fripp has driven much further." *(Orme 1981)* Although I cannot share Orme's negative appraisal of the music, in certain respects he may have been closer to the truth than he realized: for one thing, the sequenced horrors of mechanized MIDI rock were just around the corner – and as for mathematics, well, numbers and their symbolic significance had long been a keen interest of Fripp's. In May, while on tour with the League of Gentlemen, for instance, Fripp visited the fourteenth-century Town Hall building in Brussels, and in his *Musician* column waxed enthusiastic over its remarkable architectural proportions, finding therein an expression of Gurdjieff's "Law of Seven," which in turn is reflected in music's diatonic scale.

"Linguotronics": Fripp as Writer

Though "Linguotronics" is not a Frippism but rather of the present writer's coinage, the word could be Frippily, Frippishly, or Frippianistically defined as that conceptual experience resulting at the interstice of Fripp's ever-fertile brain and the printed page. In a series of articles for *Musician, Player and Listener* in 1980-1982 (as well as in album liner notes already discussed) Fripp set forth his views on a number of musical and music-industrial topics, and provided odd, quirky, yet often revealing glimpses into his own work in and outside of band situations – vignettes of rehearsals, group discussions, life on the road, and so on. This material is readily available to all who have access to a public or university library which keeps back issues of *Musician.* (See "Fripp" in the Bibliography at the back of this book for article titles, dates, etc.)

Fripp's best subject in school was English, and over the years he had given himself a writer's education by reading voraciously, particularly in the areas of philosophy and religion, social science and psychology, and economics. He made a habit of keeping a notebook of ideas and phrases, so when he began to go public in a big way with his writing, he was not entirely without craft. Yet his writing style, like his music, was often difficult, angular, not exactly forced or stilted, yet decidedly not what one would call graceful, elegant, or flowing. You can't speed-read the stuff; Fripp's sense of irony is so thick as to make his theses opaque to casual scanning. I have often wondered whether or not the difficulty of Fripp's writing is a matter of intent. It appears that he can write plainly when he wants to – but much of the time he doesn't want to. I am reminded of the different styles Gurdjieff adopted in his books. Sections of *Life is Only Real*, for instance, consist of torturously long sentences with interminable modifying digressions set off

by commas: laboring to unpack such monsters, one feels a skilful editor would have broken the original sentence into at least four or five. Other passages however are plain as day.

One feels that with Fripp's writing, the medium – the form, the style, whether oblique and inaccessible or straightforward and clear – is as important as the message. And indeed, as with some of Gurdjieff's writing, some passages of Linguotronics boil down to portraits of the creative process taking place in the midst of all-too-oppressive and unyielding material circumstances.

Dipping into this problematic pool of essays, we find Fripp kicking off the new decade with "The New Realism: A Musical Manifesto for the 80's," an anti-dinosaur diatribe with hints on "raising mammals for fun and profit." *(Fripp 1980B, 34)* Here Fripp lays out an approach to achieving "appropriate" levels of investment, publicity, and technology in the music business, with a view to the establishment of new attitudes toward the promotion of "an intermediate level of performer who will generate a respectable amount of business without colossal investment." *(Fripp 1980B, 36)* E.F. Schumacher had foreseen a radically decentralized world economy of small, largely self-supporting city states; co-opting Schumacher's economic philosophy for his own ends, Fripp declared that the music industry had already collapsed under its own weight from a moral viewpoint. He cited numerous instances he had personally witnessed of the abuse of power and money. "Small," wrote Fripp, was not only beautiful, but "intelligent and necessary." *(Fripp 1980B, 36)* In a later 1980 article entitled "The Vinyl Solution," Fripp explained his classic formulation of the "small, mobile, intelligent unit," where "intelligence is defined as the capacity to perceive rightness, mobility the capacity to act on the perception and small the necessary condition for that action in a contracting world." *(Fripp 1980C, 34)*

Little snatches of what was later to become Guitar Craft lore pop up, for instance in the "Vinyl Solution" article: "Music is the cup which holds the wine of silence" would become one of those phrases whose evocative pregnancy of meaning could give birth to whole philosophical discussions. Its context in what may be its first appearance in print ran as follows: "New music is not a style, it is a quality. It is a human requirement to make music to express all that a person would wish to say but lacks the words. It is a social requirement to make music to express all that we wish to say to each other but lose in the confusion of politics and language. For me, rock music with its malleability of form, varied idioms and accessibility to nearly everyone is ideally suited to act as a music of social requirement. And for anyone who would wish to go as far, music is a cosmic requirement, it is a direct language common to God and man where subtlety is inevitable. In this sense, music is the cup which holds the wine of silence." *(Fripp 1980C, 34)*

In "Moving Off Center: New Concepts in Stereo Mixing," Fripp offered a capsule history of the recording of rock music, noting various unsatisfactory solutions to the problem of where to put each instrument in the left-to-right aural field opened up with the development of stereo. To Fripp's way of thinking, among the more flagrant abuses of stereo were "flying tom-toms and giant drum kits straddling the stereo, conform[ing] to no performance reality" whatsoever. *(Fripp 1980A, 26)* His personal solution, exemplified in "The Zero of the Signified," was to place the rhythm section smack in the middle, effectively in mono, with the solo guitar and Frippertronics around it. In this column Fripp also discussed the approach behind his production of the Roches' first album.

More germinal Guitar Craft ideas appeared in "Creativity: Finding the Source." The essay's premise was simple: most musicians have experienced those moments of inspiration when magic seems to flow, when every note seems effortlessly right – but such moments are rare and their fleeting existence seems governed by capricious forces beyond our control. Is there any way to bring us into more consistent and productive contact with our Muse?

For Fripp the answer had a lot to do with the peculiar Western development of the ego: our tradition "identifies the musician as the originator of music rather than as one who enables music to take place." *(Fripp 1980D, 33)* In some Eastern traditions, the initial stages of musical training – sometimes before the student is even allowed to play an instrument at all – concentrate on the psychological and spiritual preparation of the musician to "handle the current" that will in due course flow through him – a current sufficiently strong, in Fripp's view, to kill a person so unfortunate as to receive an intense dose of it unprepared: Charlie Parker, Jimi Hendrix.

Fripp suggested that the contemporary Western musician can adopt a three-fold discipline – of the hands, the head, and the heart – one of those germinal soon-to-be Guitar Craft phrases. In 1980 Fripp wrote of the discipline of the hands as having to do with "an understanding of the body and how to use it in a relaxed way, breathing and developing a sense of oneself." To the discipline of the head belonged "the vocabulary of music: melody, rhythm and harmony," an understanding of the mind's processes, and the division of attention. For the heart, some system of meditation was seen as a key to maintaining "our wish to be musicians." *(Fripp 1980D, 34)* All in all, and it was a lot, Fripp concluded that "We cannot govern the breeze but we can learn how to raise the sail. This I have experienced, but infrequently." *(Fripp 1980D, 35)* It is only fair to point out that in the midst of these deep ruminations, quotations of Plato, references to Shakespeare, Goethe, Gurdjieff, whole libraries of reading and reams of living and reflection, Fripp was never above poking fun at himself. The final line of "Creativity: Finding the Source" was, "Perhaps I should shut up." *(Fripp 1980D, 35)*

(Under the assumption that some readers of the present book might be interested in following up on the concept of finding the source of creativity, I take the liberty of recommending, aside from Fripp's Guitar Craft Monographs, Silvano Arieti's *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*, which includes an outstanding bibliography for still further reading, as well as a highly useful list and discussion of "simple attitudes for the fostering of creativity in the individual." Briefly: discipline, aloneness, alertness, inactivity, daydreaming, free thinking, intentional gullibility, a state of readiness for catching similarities, and the remembrance and inner replaying of past traumatic conflicts.) *(Arieti pp. 372-9)*

In his article "The Musician in Politics" Fripp set down thoughts that would shortly be echoed on the back cover of the Frippertronics album *Let the Power Fall*, where it is written, "If we change our way of doing things, structural change necessarily follows." Fripp's view was that the revolution, if there was to be one, would come from a transformation in the lives and consciousness of individual people, and not from programs imposed from above, which inevitably breed counter-reaction. I suppose the real precedent for this line of thought is Jesus' words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you." Fripp quoted approvingly from Jacques Ellul, the French sociologist and theologian who had played a part in the resistance to German occupation and had written prophetically in 1948, "The 'style of life' is today one of the most positive forms of revolutionary action." *(Fripp 1980G, 30)* Aside from a vision of sensitive musicians working within the music industry to change the values of that industry, Fripp felt that music had a role to play in this quiet revolution on a larger scale: "Music is a high-order language system; i.e., it is a meta-language. The function of a meta-language is to express solutions to problems posed in a lower-order language system ... If one were interested in political change one would not enter political life, one would go into music." *(Fripp 1980G, 32)*

Fripp is thus not an overtly political musician – one writer has descried him as "radically apolitical" -in the sense of sloganeering for this or that political cause (except as he did develop a set of slogans for dealing with the "political" arena he knew best – the music industry). Rather, he

has been concerned to bring “politics” down from a propagandistic to a human level, to the level of the personal life we choose to lead. Ellul, following in Kierkegaard’s tradition of Christian existentialism, had concluded, after an exhaustive treatment of the subject in his tome *The Theological Foundations of Law*, that justice is not to be found where it has been theoretically legislated into being; on the contrary, justice is where the just person is. It is that tradition in which Fripp stands.

Several articles from Fripp’s *Musician* series dealt with life on the road, a subject about which the veteran touring guitarist had no illusions. He spared no effort in illuminating the situation for those innocent magazine readers still beguiled by lazy dreams of glamour, fame, riches, even “art”: “No one wanting a comfortable way of life would join a touring band; in fact, as soon as one has discovered what is really involved, only an idiot would do it.” *(Fripp 1981B, 40)*

Fripp chronicled fragments of the League of Gentlemen’s 1980 tours, painting a picture of colorful contrasts: breakdowns of the group’s rented Volkswagen Microbus and musico-architectural wonders glimpsed at the Rouens Cathedral; the sensual delights of Paris and exhausting eighteen-hour drives; conversations with David Bowie and with dinosaur promoters who had no sense of Fripp’s avowed aims. One gleans the sense that touring for Fripp was mostly hell, with occasional startling, unexpected glimpses of heaven. As we have already noted, shortly before the end of the League of Gentlemen’s final tour, Fripp took the decision to return to the “first division” of rock music – but that is the subject of our next chapter.

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Chapter Nine: King Crimson IV and Andy Summers

Why does the Devil have all the good music?

– Martin Luther

In the late fall of 1980, Fripp wanted a new top-notch band, but he had no conscious intention of re-forming King Crimson. King Crimson, he would always insist, was not something that anyone had the power deliberately to re-form. Rather, borrowing a classification scheme from British soccer leagues, he conceptualized the new band as a "first division" venture. Ever fond of systematized lists, Fripp saw three qualitatively different kinds of music-making:

> 1) Third division. Artistic research and development, a "civilized" style of life, and little or no financial remuneration. Where ideas and art exist and are experimented with for their own sake.
>
> 2) Second division. Gainful employment as a working professional musician; respectability and a certain level of commercial success, but little impact on mass culture: "You won't change the world."
>
> 3) First division. Exposure at the level of the mass media, with all its rewards and risks. For better or for worse, you become a mythical figure on the screen of contemporary consciousness. Access to the best musicians and to all current ideas, musical trends, and technologies. "Total commitment of belief, energy, life-style and time." *(See Fripp 1981B, 40 and Grabel 1982, 58)*

It was an admirably logical progression: Frippertronics, third division; League of Gentlemen, second division; King-Crimson-IV-to-be, first division. Fripp's theory of the three divisions is not however without its apparent contradictions. First division sounds suspiciously like mass culture, radio-formula music for youth markets (who buy most of the records), leveling of taste at the lowest common denominator, corporate rock – in short, anti-art; whereas all music that is really any *good* in an artistic sense is shuttled off into the culturally all-but-invisible third division, as "research and development."

It is necessary to recall Fripp's distinction between mass and popular culture. He thought of mass culture as when the music is awful and everybody goes "Yeah!" and of popular culture as when the music is great and everybody goes "Yeah!" As has been observed more than once in these pages, Fripp firmly believed in rock as the most dynamic – and hence potentially "popular" in the positive sense – music of our time. And hence good music in the first division – the Beatles, Hendrix – carried a unique potential. The saga of King Crimson's public reception from beginning to end can be considered a case study of the degree to which first division music can be artistically "advanced": how unconventional can the artist be before mass audiences, which apparently can be manipulated into saying "Yeah!" to almost anything, cease to be able to appreciate the artist's work?

First division bands have a unique opportunity to experiment with massive energies at the level of the psychological collective, because in a real sense they are among the mythical gods and heroes of our time, embodying and acting out the archetypal quests of our culture, whether this takes place for good (at the conscious level of all concerned) or for evil (at the unconscious level). First division bands, plus all the other public, political, and otherwise popular personages of our time, together make up a grand star map by means of which the impartial observer can read the constellated meaning of our collective life and judge our state of psychological health or

illness. First division bands become actors in a cosmic drama, figures in a pantheon no less real and functional than the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece (or any other ancient civilization).

This carries enormous hazards and responsibilities, of which Fripp was acutely aware. As he wrote, among the potential dangers for the individual first division musician are loss of health, sanity, and soul in the deluge of public acclaim and denigration: on the one hand, being torn apart by negative judgements, bad reviews, poor audience response – and on the other hand having adoring fans consider you to be personally deific, and starting, as the saying goes, to believe your own press releases.

Discipline: The Band

Fripp's account of the re-birth of King Crimson was published in *Musician* as a running column, "The Diary of King Crimson." *(Fripp 1981B, Fripp 1981C, Fripp 1982A)* Fripp called up Bill Bruford, who since the breakup of King Crimson III in 1974 had made three solo albums which had less than a compelling impact on fans and critics. In late 1980 or early 1981 Fripp and Bruford met at the latter's house. According to Fripp, the two "talked frankly about what I have in mind, musically and industrially, for the group." *(Fripp 1981B, 41)* In Bruford's account of the meeting, Fripp "asked me, 'What would you do if I did this?' I'd say I'd do something and he'd say, 'Wrong, try something else.' We didn't talk about it all that much ... when musicians get together they tend to play their instruments more than they talk." Evidently there was creative tension between drummer and guitarist from the outset. But this time around, Bruford tried to distance himself from Fripp's inevitable philosophizing: for him a new band had to be *fun.* He said, "I just hope we look at the cheerful, optimistic side of this and don't take ourselves too seriously – just play some music and don't get too carried away with discussion. I don't want people to feel they need a Ph.D. in behavioral sciences to understand King Crimson. It's not like that." *(Fricke 1982, 25)*

Around the same time, Fripp made a call to Adrian Belew, a versatile guitar colorist who had worked with Frank Zappa, David Bowie, and Talking Heads. Belew's own group Gaga had played five gigs in support of the League of Gentlemen. Belew, from a slightly younger generation of rock musicians, held Bruford and Fripp in the highest esteem, and was initially star-struck at the prospect of working with these giants, feeling he had to play catch-up to get on their musical level. For his part, Fripp indicated by choosing Belew that he envisioned a completely new and different band sound – never before had Fripp been in a working band with another guitarist, but at this point he was hatching a number of musical ideas specifically designed for two guitars.

The name of the new group was to be Discipline. For a bass player, Bruford suggested Jeff Berlin, with whom he had worked extensively. Eavesdropping on a Bruford/Berlin session, Fripp was impressed but decided their collective style was not what he wanted – it was too, as he put it, "busy." *(Fripp 1981B, 41)* So with Belew on tour with Talking Heads, in February 1981 Fripp and Bruford went to New York in search of a bassist. At the auditions, Bruford would pop in a cassette of a 17/8 riff and the would-be Discipline bassist would be asked to play it back. This in itself was sufficient to sort out as it were the men from the boys, but Fripp was also looking for a certain quality in the very person of the bassist.

On the third day of auditions, Tony Levin came by. Levin was a perennially active session player whose credits included work on Lennon and Ono's *Double Fantasy* and touring with Peter Gabriel. Fripp, fully aware of Levin's reputation and credentials, had assumed Levin too busy to

consider joining a new band, otherwise he "would have been my first call." *(Fripp 1981B, 41)* Besides bass, Levin could play the Chapman stick, an electric instrument with five higher strings played by the right hand and five lower strings played by the left. Stick technique involves elements of both of guitar and keyboard fingering: as on piano, widely-spaced chord voicings and simultaneous independent melodic lines can be negotiated, while the player's fingers' direct contact with the strings makes possible bent notes, vibrato, and other subtleties of guitar technique. Fed through various kinds of electronic processing equipment, the stick is capable of producing a wide array of timbres.

The musicians of Discipline were in place. Early exploratory rehearsals, under way by March or April, were inspiring for Fripp. In the rush of ideas and musical camaraderie, he wrote that "Music can present a picture of the ideal society and bring it a step nearer ... If one views music as a blueprint for an ideal society, how the society of players organize themselves has to be in step with the imaginary society presented in the music they play." *(Fripp 1981B, 42)* In spite of all the optimism, within three years this band would come apart like the others Fripp had worked in and believed so much in, and for similar reasons. Fripp – earnest architect of doomed utopias?

With Discipline, at any rate, he was from the outset aware of a certain personal paradox, which he discussed with the group's members, describing it as "my problem of having a firm idea of what the band should sound like but not wanting to be a band leader." *(Fripp 1981B, 42)* The idea of an autocratic band leader contradicted everything he saw himself standing for in the way of a creative, collective music-making process. If he let himself become a band leader, he would be no different from all those Western musicians who in presumptuously designating themselves Composers with a capital "C" had succeeded over the past two hundred years or more only in sucking the life out of classical music, turning performers into score-deafly-reading automatons, and audiences into sheep all too willing to wallow in pathetic hero-worship under the guise of initiated appreciation of the Great Music of the Masters. Yep, Fripp had a problem.

But for the moment the sheer pleasure of practicing music with the new band was enough. Fripp's "Diary" bursts with enthusiasm when describing the sessions. The very first encounter with Levin, at the afternoon "audition," Fripp described as "one of the best musical experiences of my life." *(Fripp 1981B, 41)* He called the two-guitar sound at the first official rehearsal, on April 2nd, "fabulous." Together the group "began to sound like a rock gamelan." *(Fripp 1981B, 42)* (The playing of the gamelan orchestras of Indonesia features tightly interlocking rhythmic and motivic patterns on an assortment of xylophones, pitched bells, and other instruments; Indonesian scales correspond to no Western well-tempered equivalents, and lend the music a harmonic sheen of exotic piquancy.)

In the rehearsals' better moments, the leadership question seemed to work itself out; Fripp wrote that the role of leader "shifts among the players. There's often good anarchism, where we all have our own parts, each worth listening to and autonomous, but played together. The listener can switch attention from one instrument to another." *(Fripp 1981B, 46)*

By April 22, the group had some sixty-five minutes of presentable music *(Fripp 1982A, 35)*, and on April 30th they played their first gig, at Moles restaurant in Bath. Fripp was throwing himself into the music and the development of ideas for its presentation and marketing with all his energy, and his published "Diary" reflects his mood swings, which tended to follow the quality of rehearsals. One day he would be elated; another he would write, "I'm exhausted, irritable and just hanging in there." *(Fripp 1982A, 103)*

As far as the music was concerned, Fripp's main battles were with Bruford, over finding an appropriate drumming style. Fripp described Bruford as a vigorous and expressive drummer with a never-ending flow of ideas; the problem for Fripp was how to get Bruford to calm down, to play less, to trust that the music's structure called not for lots of fancy fills and dramatic, dynamic phrase articulations but rather for restraint, control, and less busy-ness. Fripp was concerned that the rhythmic subtleties of the guitar, bass, and stick parts not be covered up by drum thrashing. In a long list of suggestions for Bruford, which he published for the world to see in his *Musician* column, Fripp advised, "If you fill space, you deprive the band of space, or other musicians the opportunity for filling space." *(Fripp 1981B, 48)*

Bruford had been emotionally bruised by Fripp's breaking up King Crimson III in 1974, an action which in 1982 Bruford said he still didn't understand. Having played the part of the "jilted lover," as he put it, in the breakup of KC III, he was understandably wary of investing too much emotionally in the new band. But he welcomed the renewed opportunity to play with Fripp and company, figuring to learn enough in three years with the band to keep him busy for five or more after that. Bruford spoke of the band members dealing gingerly with Fripp at first, nervous that the wrong note or attitude might result in the collapse of the whole project: according to Bruford, Fripp "was returning to the battlefield and I don't think anyone wanted to scare him off." *(Fricke 1982, 25)* As the group's work together developed, Bruford rose to the challenge of dealing with Fripp's very specific ideas for the group sound, and even seemed to thrive on their prickly exchanges. Of Fripp's list of suggestions for his drumming, Bruford said, in a 1982 interview, "It starts out as a stream of negatives first off, which cracks many a lesser man. 'Don't do this, don't do that, and I suggest you don't do this. By the way, I also recommend you don't do that.' You're in a prison and you've got to find your way out of things. I quite like that. I must be a masochist or something, but I don't feel right unless I'm imprisoned and told to find a way around it. That's the challenge." *(Fricke 1982, 25)*

With Belew, Fripp's concern was the reverse: how to coax him out into the open, how to encourage him to contribute genuine aspects of his own musical personality to a group which he initially felt was playing at a level way over his head. It was up to Belew to deliver lyrics and vocal lines for existing instrumentals the group had worked up, and in time he began to find his voice. Fripp was constantly impressed with Levin's musicianship and personal qualities; the bass player, whom Fripp described as the best he'd ever worked with, seemed to have a certain solid, silent strength. Fripp wrote that "Tony is always on: he doesn't seem to have our concerns." *(Fripp 1982A, 103)*

King Crimson Born Again

During rehearsals the sense that Fripp, Bruford, Belew, and Levin *were* King Crimson had been creeping up on Fripp little by little, and he struggled over whether or not to use the name. On the negative side, calling the group King Crimson could set up false audience expectations and kindle attitudes that Fripp had tried to lay permanently to rest in 1974; it would also inevitably be perceived as a shameless publicity ploy. On the other hand, King Crimson – the idea, the name – had earned a certain iconic status in popular culture, and represented for Fripp a source of powerful energies waiting to be tapped.

The Americans in the group – Belew and Levin – were uncomfortable with the name Discipline, though prepared to put up with it if Fripp insisted. Belew explained: "For me, being the kind of person I am, I'm not real disciplined, I'm kinda loose, and being an American, the

term discipline is not a good, friendly, outgoing term, you know. It's not the kind of thing I would call the band. And Tony felt the same way." *(Dallas 1981B, 27)* Bruford was glad to reclaim the King Crimson name, though he did wish to distance himself somewhat from Frippian philosophics: "I'm honoured. It was an honourable name ... Mel Collins may have come and gone and Keith Tippett may have come and gone and Boz Burrell may have come and gone, but basically this thing, King Crimson, continues, because there was a spirit about it and an attractive way of thinking about music, some ground rules, which continue. Robert will talk endlessly about icons and things, but to us plain Englishmen it just seems a very good idea for a group and we've reharnessed this, we've kind of gone back into it." *(Dallas 1981B, 27)*

In a press release coinciding with the release of *Discipline* in September 1981, Fripp stated that "It was never my intention to re-form King Crimson, that eclectic, forward-looking band of unsettling nature." Anticipating a cynical reception from critics who would deem him "an opportunist turkey, a fraud, and a charlatan," he offered several answers to the question of why the group was calling itself King Crimson. The most cogent and direct was that "King Crimson has a life of its own, despite what its members say and do. Any thought-form which attracts interest becomes partly iconic and since the group 'ceased to exist' in 1974 interest has continued. At the beginning of rehearsals during the first week of April, I recognized this potential hovering behind the band, an available energy if we chose to plug in." *(The full text of the press release is printed in Barber 1981A.)* Fripp's recognition of this "available energy" was a direct and palpable experience: one day, driving over to Bruford's house, he felt it hovering above his head to the left.

The moment when Discipline became King Crimson occurred near Paris when the band was touring France. Fripp, Bruford, and Belew were talking over the name situation on their tour bus, and it emerged that they wished to be known as King Crimson. When Levin came in, they asked how he felt about it, and he agreed. Over the next few years, most critics seemed to accept the King Crimson Name: it was as legitimate as any other top-notch band formed by Robert Fripp.

Debra Rae Cohen, reviewing a November 1981 concert at the Savoy, wrote in the *Village Voice*: "On stage, each member has a distinctive presence – Bruford, the drummer-jock, powerful behind his kit, Tony Levin looming in his spotlit virtuosity; Fripp seated, purposely in shadow; most importantly, Adrian Belew as charming frontperson." *(Cohen 1981, 57)* Fripp may have been the band's effective leader, but onstage he was as inscrutable and undemonstrative as ever; it fell to Belew to flirt actively with the audience, to be the extrovert.

Fripp is fond of referring to the King Crimson of the second half of 1981 as "the best performing rock band in the world." *(Mulhern 1986, 94)* There is little doubt that it was among the most technically proficient touring rock outfits, but some critics wondered whether the virtuosic displays were enough to make the music really work as music. Cary Darling, reviewing a 1982 concert at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, wrote of "technical prowess and instrumental overkill at the expense of true inspiration ... a classic example of skill over passion, brain over heart." *(Darling 1982A, 35)* Ethlie Ann Vare, who reviewed a 1984 concert at the same venue, echoed the sentiment: "The trouble with having four certified musical geniuses on stage at the same time is that if you aren't enjoying the show, you assume it must be your own fault. After poking yourself awake for the third time, you realize that it may, in fact, be the fault of the performers; this is supposed to be a concert, not an IQ test." King Crimson "offered up almost two hours of atonality, syncopation, and cacophony." *(Vare 1984, 47)*

Even John Rockwell, the *New York Times* music writer who in 1978 had supported Fripp's New York sojourn with a sympathetic, understanding, and complimentary article, was not

wholly convinced by King Crimson's performance at New York's Pier 84 in June 1984. Rockwell wrote, "Tuesday's set was intricate and intelligent, if a little staid ... Mr. Belew's voice is undistinguished and his songwriting elusive and fragmentary: when it evinces any personality at all, it sounds like David Byrne and Talking Heads. And the long instrumentals too rarely built, Tuesday at least, to a satisfying climax. Everything sounded cool, careful and a bit too calculated." *(Rockwell 1984, C17)* Even those critics who found live King Crimson IV excessively cerebral, however, pointed out that the audience's reception of the group was for the most part spirited and enthusiastic.

King Crimson IV: The Albums

When it comes to assessing King Crimson IV's recorded output – the handsomely packaged trilogy of *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three of a Perfect Pair* – my mind is in such a muddle that I feel I must first digress to a consideration of what such an assessment might really mean. Against the prevailing atmosphere of insanity – that is, insane and/or idiotic views and arguments about music – that characterized my graduate school education, a few moments stand out in memory as crystallizations of ... well, as moments when at least something with interesting implications was being said with conviction. One such moment occurred in a seminar on the idea and practice of music criticism, when Professor Phillip Brett declared, "Music criticism involves making judgements about pieces of music, and that's one thing that adult human beings do – they make judgements." I chewed on that for a long time.

A little later I read, in the scholarly journal *Popular Music*, William Brooks' article "On Being Tasteless." Brooks argued that to allow our own personal taste to leak into our scholarship was to sacrifice objectivity, and that there was plenty to be learned from dispassionate, "objective" analysis of popular music and its cultural impact. Still later I confronted the thinking of British and Continental sociologists of rock, who, so far as I could make out, were uninterested in what you had to say about music unless your thesis was grounded in – and ultimately merely a supporting argument for – some sweeping geopolitical theory, preferably socialist in nature. Finally I found myself reading the likes of Coomaraswamy and Gurdjieff, whose concept of "objective art" seemed to blow all the other stuff right out of the water. (We will return to "objective art" in the final chapter of this book.)

I may have thought some of my professors insane, but, like every graduate student, I assumed they knew everything. So when I realized by degrees that many of them had never heard of King Crimson, let alone heard any of their music, it was with some considerable astonishment. A lot of my thinking about the aesthetics of music began to take a new turn when I started recognizing the extent to which genre expectations and pure "sound" values shape people's responses to, and judgements of, pieces of music. To put it simply, I understood that some of my professors – who were world-class music scholars in their fields – would never be able to form a right judgement about a group like King Crimson, simply because the "sound" of rock music was a closed book to them. Nearly a century ago, one of musicology's founding fathers, Guido Adler, defined the new discipline's agenda in terms of documenting the historical evolution of musical style. But, as I was coming to see, when a scholar has no ingrained sense of the vocabulary and musical values of a particular style, when he hasn't "experienced" the style's power and subtlety in a direct, intuitive, physical way – regardless of whether it's Chuck Berry, Ravi Shankar, or Ludwig van Beethoven – then no meaningful assessment of style is possible.

I am not prepared to throw in the towel with Brooks, abandoning all attempts at aesthetic judgement on the grounds that subjective taste is illegitimate in serious discussion of music: if I judge King Crimson, it is because I feel I have a right to do so, having cultivated rock and roll in my soul from the days when I struggled to play the guitar chords to songs in *The Golden Beatles* and squeak out the words in my pre-adolescent voice. But it should be clear that I am under no illusion that this chapter or this book are the final word on King Crimson.

They are indeed a cohesive set, those three albums – *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three of a Perfect Pair* – sporting similar layout and typography on their respectively red, blue, and yellow covers. In what follows, I will treat the albums as a trilogy – that is, as a single body of music. In the short span of their existence, King Crimson IV created and developed a new rock style, almost unparalleled in its sophistication. Elements and sources of inspiration: the beat(s) and instrumental format(s) of rock; world music, notably Indonesian gamelan and African percussion; high technology, notably guitar synthesizers, effects, and synth drums; and minimalism.

Overall style? Complex meters, polymeter, ostinatos, short note values and slashing or delicately wafting guitar chords, precisely controlled instrumental textures, overlapping non-synchronizing phrasing between instruments, ambiguous/shifting tonality, and driving yet often understated percussion. King Crimson IV's basic framework, or sound-ideal, which included certain approaches to form, rhythm, harmony, melody, and texture, was rich enough to permit considerable experimentation without the group's ever exactly repeating itself. When they did start almost to repeat themselves, they called it quits.

The recording process itself Bruford described as "agonizing ... quite slow. If we systematized this and we had Lennon and McCartney and the drummer was quiet and behaved himself and shut up, and the other guitar player didn't say that much, then you'd have a system and presumably you'd produce your product off your assembly line faster ... We have no method and we can never seem to find one ... or perhaps we're not looking for one." *(Hoffmeister 1984, 11)* In the academic world this is known as the perils of committee work.

I originally intended to organize this discussion according to specific song types, but on listening and re-listening to the music concluded that there are few if any song "types" here – rather a situation where a number of specific *controlling ideas* manifest themselves to one degree or another from track to track, often with more than one controlling idea in a single piece. On record, King Crimson I and King Crimson II worked with well-delineated song types and their juxtapositions: an album was like a set of contrasting paintings hanging in a gallery. Recorded King Crimson IV – all three albums' worth – is more like a continuously sustained vision, a set of possibilities that permutate from piece to piece, a view through a kaleidoscope that shifts at each slight turn of the barrel, a sculpture in the round seen from different angles as one slowly circles it. And by and large, like Beethoven's, it is an architectural rather than a lyrical style. And I am bound to say that it appeals to this head somewhat at the expense of this heart.

On all three albums, the composition of the music is credited to King Crimson, that is, to all four musicians without distinction. Belew wrote all the lyrics, with the exception of "Two Hands" on *Beat*, whose lyrics are by his wife Margaret Belew.

One firm typological line can be drawn, for what it's worth, and that is between songs (with vocals) and purely instrumental pieces. On the three albums there are exactly twice as many songs (sixteen) as instrumental pieces (eight). And I suppose it is here that I must pronounce a judgement, to wit, that as a group, the instrumental compositions are superior to the songs, if not in originality and complexity then at least in diversity and clarity. To put it simply, Belew's lyrics and singing are largely a distraction; the vocal melodies, for the most part, smack of being laid on

top of existing instrumental tracks as an afterthought, they don't strike me as having grown organically with the rest of the music, but rather as somewhat laboriously and manneristically following the rhythmic and harmonic backings, which get covered up, pointlessly, because they are by and large much more interesting and vital than the sung tunes and lyrics themselves. There are exceptions, "Frame by Frame," "Matte Kudasai," "Waiting Man," "Two Hands," "Three of a Perfect Pair" – all are songs with genuine melodic contour and interest.

Among the vocal songs, distinctions can be drawn between those with pitched melodies, those with spoken (or shouted) text, and those that are both sung and spoken.

But back to King Crimson IV's "controlling ideas." A list of these might include rock and roll, the rock gamelan, the rock ballad, metrical complications, guitar synth colors, industrial noise elements, jungle feel, improvisational feel, and the use of radically different textures within a single piece. Let's look at these ideas more closely and see how they affect and shape specific pieces in the trilogy.

Rock and Roll

Well, it's all rock and roll – sort of. It's rock and roll if rock and roll is "our most malleable art form" and the rest of it. In a narrower stylistic definition, King Crimson IV on record played little bona fide rock and roll – they played eclectic late-twentieth century compositions orchestrated with electronic rock timbres. "Sleepless" is among the few pieces that just plain old rocks out in straight-ahead 4/4 with a couple of elementary chord changes; and even "Sleepless" may have started out as something more adventurous – according to Belew, "the best mix of 'Sleepless' has never seen the light of day ... Bob Clearmountain did the single remix and then someone at Warner Brothers decided that the LP version should match the single version," over the wishes of the band. *(Hoffmeister 1984, 8)*

The Rock Gamelan

King Crimson IV's most distinctive contribution to the rock vocabulary was an outgrowth of Fripp's experiments in fast staccato picking patterns with the League of Gentlemen. He continued to develop this technique with the new King Crimson, and among the most impressive passages in their music are those where two, three, or all four musicians are playing rapid-fire ostinati that interlock and counterpoint each other in a glittering pointillistic texture reminiscent of the gamelan orchestras of Indonesia. Such intricate textures can be heard on "Elephant Talk," "Frame by Frame," "Discipline," "Neal and Jack and Me," "Waiting Man," and "Three of a Perfect Pair." Following the demise of King Crimson IV, the gamelan concept would live on in the precisely controlled communal polyphonic pointillism of the League of Crafty Guitarists. For Fripp, who in his own words felt he had already "done the great-soloist thing to death," the gamelan concept reflected a musical interest in time and rhythm, and, as he put it, "stepping back into the group structure and blending into the communal dynamic." *(Garbarini 1984, 40)* For Fripp to play his rhythm-lead-point style was also a kind of sacrifice; he was laying out the carpet, as it were, for the other musicians to stand on – creating a space in which the music could happen.

Metrical Complications

The gamelan-like texture readily lends itself to polymeter – where the players share a common pulse or beat, but group their beats in measures of different lengths. Such is the premise of the instrumental piece "Discipline," for instance, where beat groupings of two, three, four,

five, and even seventeen jockey for the baffled listener's attention. Less complicated, but equally upsetting to the casual listener's sense of time, are the many passages in five and seven, often with unexpected accents on subdivisions of the measure. The refrain of "Model Man," for instance, being in 7/4, sounds oddly out of whack, coming on the heels of the plain 4/4 verses.

Ballads

Only two songs on the three albums have a real "ballad" feel – the gentle "Matte Kudasai" and the yearning "Two Hands." "Matte Kudasai" gently lopes along like electronic country and western mood music. "Two Hands" is pure transparency, framed by brief guitar bagpipe sections. Two other songs – "Model Man" and "Man with an Open Heart" – feature ballad elements, but overall have a bigger, less intimate sound.

Guitars

King Crimson IV was formed at precisely the time when a vast array of new timbres was becoming available to guitarists through guitar synthesizer controllers, and the three albums are virtually a catalog of imaginative effects. Even when playing ordinary electric guitar, Fripp and Belew were apt to run the signal through all manner of devices – chorus, flanger, and delay boxes – giving the music a distinctively 1980s sound.

In keeping with the spirit of the band, in many pieces these colors are largely blended in with the overall band sound, rather than used as a pretext for extended soloing. Such solos as there are tend to be restrained and understated, choice aphorisms rather than lengthy dissertations. Especially gratifying are those pieces where Fripp's and Belew's very different personal styles complement each other, neither guitarist grandstanding but rather allowing himself to become part of a larger whole. "The Sheltering Sky" represents such a process: Fripp's precise punctuated picking and strumming complements Belew's lush, coloristic orchestral sounds. Fripp said that the piece "wrote itself. We were simply trying to discover who we were for each other. We were in a fourteenth-century hunting lodge in Dorset and we just played. It was a group composition. It came simply out of the air, while everyone was looking the other way. And it kind of played itself." *(De Curtis 1984, 23)*

The three albums are a guitarist's garden of delights. Consider:

- Belew's squeaky mouse and trumpeting elephant noises on "Elephant Talk."
- The Fripp versus Belew, pointillism versus slashing rhythm duel on "Frame by Frame," and the same song's coda with polyrhythmic points.
- The guitar synth "seagulls" and Fripp high-sustain countermelodies and brief solo on "Matte Kudasai."
- Fripp's tasty outbursts on "Neal and Jack and Me."
- The "backwards" solo on "Heartbeat."
- Belew's screeching glissando solo on "Waiting Man."
- The bittersweet "weeping" solo on "Two Hands."
- The moment of marvelously tinny solo rhythm guitar on "The Howler," and the following insane synth-noise solo.
- The plucked and careening rhythm guitars in "Model Man"'s refrain.
- The savage punctuating chords during the instrumental portions of "Sleepless."
- Fripp's rhapsodic soloing on "Requiem."

Industrial Noise Elements

The marriage of industrial sounds with performed music goes back to the Italian futurists of the 1910s and 1920s, who proposed a new aesthetic of the machine age and whose compositions included all manner of noisemaking devices, including both found objects and newly invented instruments. Futurism was not restricted to music; it touched literature and other arts as well. Long before John Cage systematically obliterated the distinctions between sound and music, composition and chance, audience and performer, life and art, the painter Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) advanced the idea that all sounds were available to composers as potentially musical materials. In 1925 George Antheil (1900-1959) staged his *Ballet mecanique* – an "industrial" art-work for player pianos, percussion, and airplane motors.

Industrial rock was becoming a genre unto itself in the early 1980s; the German group Einsturzende Neubauten used power drills, jackhammers, broken glass, elevator springs, and toy keyboards on their 1981 debut album *Kollaps.* King Crimson IV toyed with the concept: several songs ("Indiscipline," "Neurotica," "Dig Me," "No Warning") contained an imaginative array of metallic clashes, clangs, sirens, factory sounds, and the like. One instrumental, "Industry," was a dedicated study in nuanced noise: over an ominous one-pitch bass ostinato repeating every nine beats unfolds, with rising intensity, a succession of guitar synthesizer layers, spasmodic drum fills, mechanical sound effects, orchestroid outbursts, and sky-saws. "Industry," a brilliantly effective tableau, may sound improvised, but Belew said it was the result of much pre-planning: "Bill had the idea of the orchestral snare drum. Robert and I developed all the guitar ideas very carefully – the harmonies and things. It's supposed to give you a feeling of walking through a factory." *(Hoffmeister 1984, 8)*

Jungle Feel

Another trend in twentieth-century music and art has been primitivism, ever since Stravinsky (*The Rite of Spring*, 1912) and Picasso (*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907) unlocked the gates. Rock has always been jungle music to some listeners – I remember my seventh-grade music teacher playing the fade-out of the Stones' "Salt of the Earth" from *Beggar's Banquet* next to a recording of African drumming, inviting the class to contemplate the similarities. By 1990, needless to say, in worlds academic as well as everyday, labeling some cultures and art forms "primitive" and others "advanced" or "sophisticated" has become rightfully suspect. "World music" seems a less pejorative handle.

1981 was a watershed in the deliberate fusion of rock with world music: David Byrne and Brian Eno's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* melded musical elements from Africa and the Middle East with a pop beat and tape loops of American radio evangelists. It's all one, the album seemed to be saying, and before long there was a growth of interest in authentic African traditional and popular music, leading to the world beat phenomenon of the 1980s, and to today's diversified ethno-pop scene. (Fripp sat in one of the sessions for *Bush of Ghosts*, but his playing does not appear on the album.)

King Crimson IV's adaptation of world music elements was more subtle than *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.* The "rock gamelan" concept was less an incorporation of exotic timbres than an internalization and transformation of Indonesian textural and compositional concepts. On a number of other tunes, such as "The Sheltering Sky," Bruford plays tuned drums with soft mallets, or electronic percussion that gives the music a distinctly "ethnic" air. In "Thela Hun Ginjeet" (the title is an anagram of "heat in the jungle"), over a Bruford jungle rhythm and between sections of fine nasally nasty synthesizer guitar work, we hear a shaken and nervous

Belew telling how he was mugged on the way to the recording studio. (Fripp had surreptitiously turned on a tape recorder as Belew was talking.)

Improvisational Feel

Much of recorded King Crimson IV's music was carefully worked out beforehand. With the metrical complications, it could be no other way. Another indication of the extent of compositional pre-planning lies in Fripp's repeatedly expressed displeasure at Bruford's tendency to change his drum parts. Several pieces, though, sound more improvisational:

"Requiem" begins with a Fripp guitar solo over Frippertronics backing. A gloomy minor mode, fully appropriate for a mass for the dead, prevails. Before long, as Fripp works his initial statement to a climax, the other musicians enter, and soon it is free-form freakout time, the spirit of "Moonchild" and improvising King Crimson III all over again. When the thrashing subsides, the Frippertronics backing has changed to an eerie augmented harmony – the transfiguration of the soul?

Also reminiscent of earlier King Crimsons is the haunting instrumental "Nuages (That Which Passes, Passes Like Clouds)," wherein acoustic and electric guitars paint sublime melodies over a strange backdrop of muted electronic percussion, bass, and mellotron-like synthesizer. Minor and augmented harmonies all over the place.

"No Warning" is another improvised piece, this time in the industrial noise mode. While by way of unifying elements "Nuages" has steady percussion, "Industry" has the bass ostinato, and "Requiem" has Frippertronics; "No Warning," though not without a certain raw charm, was intentionally, shall we say, undisciplined. Belew's account of the piece's genesis is as follows: "The idea really came up, I think, through my suggestion to try to go into the studio and not play together, with simply one sort of direction in mind – that being industrial sounds. We wanted to go in and sound like a giant factory, but without really listening to each other. I think we got about forty minutes of industrial bashing and crashing and then we edited it down to a couple of bits." *(Hoffmeister 1984, 8)*

Radically Different Textures within a Single Piece

Though the typical King Crimson IV composition is sectional, with several changes in overall texture, one or two are based on *radically* contrasting sections. The fierce "Indiscipline" begins with tentative atonal metallic sounds, then lurches into all-out guitar mayhem over bass ostinati. Belew described the song's typically Crimsoid growth process: "'Indiscipline' started out as a vehicle for some pretty erratic drumming. Originally it was almost a throwaway, a drum solo with a riff hung on it. Eventually I came up with a little melody, Robert came up with a line for himself, and at that point we thought no, it's still not enough ... So I thought of doing these talk sections throughout the song. We did that the very last day of recording. I took a letter my wife had written me about a painting she had done. I just took all these lines out of context without specifically naming what the subject was, then added a few lines of my own." *(Fricke 1982, 24)*

Likewise notable as a study in contrasts is "Dig Me," where the verses consist of chaotic electronic and percussive noises and the refrain is a smooth vocal phrase over a single major chord.

Harmony

In music theory the word “harmony” refers not to some vague idea about what sounds good, but to the carefully formalized principles of chord formation and chord succession – how one chord moves to another, and the structural and psychological properties of such chord successions. “Tonality” is a concept that embraces not just the movements of individual chords from one to the other, but the Western system of major and minor keys developed over a period of centuries. The trained musician or listener *feels* a sense of key, a sense that there is a central point of gravity, the tonic or keynote; and that sense is reinforced through conventional usage of melodies and motives in major and minor scales that tend to begin and end on the key-note. In classical tonal music, chord progressions are movements through tonal space, movements that give a sense of depth to the music, and, through constant reinforcement through repetition, a sense of logic and rightness, however learned and thus culture-specific that sense may be.

Specific tonal styles rely on specific emphases within the harmonic spectrum: the late-Baroque style of Bach on fast harmonic rhythm and lingering Renaissance modal usage as well as advanced chromaticism; the classical-period style of Haydn and Mozart on slower harmonic rhythm and heavy psycho-structural reliance on the tonic-dominant (I-V, C-G7) relationship, classic urban blues on a three-chord set (tonic-dominant-subdominant, I-V-IV, C-G-F), jazz on circle-of-fifths chord progressions (III-VI-II-V-I, E-A-D-G-C), early rock and roll on a four-chord set (I-vi-IV-V, C-Am-F-G, “Heart and Soul”), later rock on an interpenetration of parallel major and minor modes.

King Crimson IV almost completely abandoned such traditional patterns of chord succession in favor of what might be called *shifting harmonic planes*: the music moves along around one chord or harmonic area for a time, then abruptly shifts to another. King Crimson IV’s harmonic shifts often make little or no sense in terms of conventional tonal harmonic theory. You hear a sudden broad change of harmony, and hence change of “tonal color,” but the change follows no, shall we say, historically ordained precedent. Because of the reliance on triads and seventh chords, there may *seem* to be harmonic activity, but this is an illusion: there are changes or shifts, but no real sense of gravitational motion through tonal space. This is not necessarily a negative point: I am simply saying that the music relies more on rhythm and texture than on tonality.

A metaphor might clarify the position. In traditional Western harmonic procedure, whether Mozart or blues or jazz, the *drive to the end of each phrase* is accomplished at least in part through harmonic motion (chord changes), and the sense is one of a large boulder being pulled inexorably down a hill by the sheer force of tonal gravity. With King Crimson IV’s music, the boulder sits on one level spot and rumbles around for a while, until sooner or later the hand of God comes along and moves it to a different, perhaps seemingly arbitrary spot, where it again sits and rumbles.

The majority of King Crimson IV pieces employ this sort of static harmonic technique. Sometimes a classical tonal logic can be discerned in the shifts from one static harmonic area to another. “Sartori in Tangiers,” for instance, sits on D minor for a long time, then moves to F major, then to G major; it finishes on D minor again. More often, though, the harmonic shifts are among areas only distantly related, if at all, through the laws of traditional tonal harmony. “Discipline” shifts as follows: D minor – E major – F# minor – A minor – C minor – C# minor – E minor – F# minor. “Neal and Jack and Me” revolves around A minor, C# minor, F# minor, and D minor. “Thela Hun Ginjeet” shifts from F# minor to A minor to B minor to D minor. (This

brief listing of harmonic areas may seem to reveal a preference for minor over major modes, but what I am calling "minor" is often a pentatonic mode articulated through gamelan-guitar motifs.)

A few other harmonic systems are employed. Sections of some pieces are virtually atonal – non-triadic, no tonal center (the spoken vocal sections of "Neurotica" and "Dig Me"). A few are resolutely tonal, with gravitational harmonic progressions ("Matte Kudasai," "Two Hands," the refrain of "Model Man"). "The Sheltering Sky" is based on continuous alternation of harmonic areas around E and G.

In Fripp's analysis, later King Crimson IV was less a cohesive band with a group mind than four individuals pursuing their individual aims. And indeed, on *Three of a Perfect Pair*, the last record in the trilogy, we can hear Belew's more poppish side coming to the fore on Side One, Bruford's fondness for beating the stuffing out his drums on Side Two, and Levin's synthesizer experiments on both sides. For his part, Fripp shines as a soloist on "Nuages," and then has the last word in the final cut on Side Two: "Larks' Tongues in Aspic Part III," seemingly a deliberate effort at a culminating statement on this phase of his career. "Larks' Tongues in Aspic Part III" is a complex, sectional, through-composed instrumental reminiscent of Crimson's style circa 1974, but with the tone colors of the technological 1980s. Fripp kicks it off with a demonically swift guitar passage which he is quite possibly the only person on earth capable of playing with a flat pick. Much as I would like to ... to *believe* in this piece, after its impressive opening flourishes it lapses into a long and somewhat tedious drum four-count and then has the gall to *fade out* rather than bring itself to a completion. Quite a contrast to the resounding, earth-shaking closing bars of "Red"'s "Starless" ten years earlier.

Clearly, by 1984, Fripp's heart was already elsewhere. In 1981 King Crimson had meant something to him – a "second shot," as he put it, of the spirit of music he had glimpsed in 1969; now it was in danger of becoming another dinosaur, a non-communal collective enterprise rife with egotistical aspirations. Fripp was ambivalent with regard to Crimson's accomplishments. Shortly before the band's breakup, he said, "In '81 when Crimson was out, I felt that it was the best performing live rock band in the world. My feeling is that Crimson is primarily a live band and has not yet found a way of putting it on record." *(DeCurtis 1984, 23)* Many recording and mixing decisions in the making of *Beat*, for example, had been left to the album's producer, Rhett Davies, since the members of the band could not make up their collective mind about the sound.

Critical response to the King Crimson IV trilogy of albums was predictably diverse. The *Melody Maker* review of *Discipline* by Lynden Barber grudgingly conceded the album's "moments of greatness" after waxing sarcastic about "The Sheltering Sky," "a drippy, overlong piece of doodling that should have Genesis fans closing their eyes and muttering phrases like 'distinguished musicianship' while the rest of us fall asleep." *(Barber 1981B, 20)* By *Three of a Perfect Pair*, Barber had completely had it: "If most of the first side keeps the mind politely bored with Adrian Belew's increasingly irritating David Byrne tributes, its flip side is little more than tedious muso muck of the very worst order, clodhopping bass and senseless lumps of 'improvisation.'" *(Barber 1984, 27)*

John Piccarella's *Rolling Stone* review of *Discipline* contained qualified praise for "this band of virtuosos," and his judgement of "The Sheltering Sky" was substantially more generous than Barber's: "Bill Bruford's gentle, tapped-out African slit-drum pulsations and Tony Levin's growling bass drones combine with sinuous guitar-synthesizer lines into something like Jon Hassell and Brian Eno's 'Fourth World' music." *(Piccarella 1982, 51)* Other American writers heaped on the superlatives, Thomas Mulhern citing King Crimson's "exciting adventurism," *(Mulhern 1982A, p. 140)* Mark Peel proclaiming their "cohesiveness and clarity of vision," *(Peel 1982A, 71)* Parke Puterbaugh calling Fripp and Belew's "interlocking, cyclical guitar work ... a

marvel of control and technique that's all the more remarkable given the contrasting dispositions of the two players. Belew: congenial, humanistic, creator of a menagerie of witty, animate guitar noises. Fripp: formal, methodical, rational in the pursuit of extremes." *(Puterbaugh 1984, 56)*

In the latter stages of King Crimson IV, Fripp went public with his frustrations about the group's evolution on a number of occasions. In May 1984 *Record* published a substantial interview with Fripp by Anthony DeCurtis, in which Fripp is quoted as saying of the group: "I feel I've created a field in which other people can discover themselves. I'm disappointed that they don't create the room for me to discover myself. That is the dynamic of what happens: I get squeezed out. You have three guys who are very excited about someone providing them with room. And there's me saying, 'Great guys. The three of you are doing wonderful things. Can I come in, please? Is there a space?' So all my best guitar work is done outside Crimson. I like space, if there's an awful lot going on, I tend not to play." *(DeCurtis 1984, 22-23)*

With Andy Summers

While toiling, often in pain and anguish, with King Crimson IV, Fripp found a measure of respite in his independent collaborations with Police guitarist Andy Summers, the old friend in whose footsteps he'd followed as guitarist for the Hebrew Fraternity at the Majestic Hotel in Bournemouth. Fripp's work with Summers took place entirely during the King Crimson IV period, and resulted in two albums: *I Advance Masked* was recorded at Arny's Shack in Dorset in September 1981 and Island Studios in London in May 1982, and *Bewitched* was "recorded in spurts" *(Liner notes to Bewitched)* at Arny's Shack in April and May of 1984.

Though they'd known each other for many years, Summers and Fripp had never played music together. It was Summers who instigated their collaboration: wanting, as he put it, to "work with another guitar player and try to get an ongoing musical relationship started," he first called Fripp at the end of a Police tour in 1980. *(Darling 1982B, 48)* In addition to their studio sessions together, Summers and Fripp contemplated a live tour, but were unable to find time in their busy schedules.

I Advance Masked was a true "solo" collaboration between the two guitarists: they co-produced the album and played all the instruments, which aside from guitars and Roland guitar synthesizers included Fender bass, Roland and Moog keyboard synthesizers, and various percussion. *Bewitched*, on the other hand, was produced by Summers, who enlisted the help of five other musicians to complete the tracks (Chris Childs, bass; Sara Lee, bass; Paul Beavis, drums; Chris Winter, saxophone; and Jesse Lota, tablas). While Fripp's contributions to "Bewitched" are vital, his involvement with the album was less than it had been with *I Advance Masked*: he worked on *Bewitched* for only two and a half weeks before leaving for a King Crimson tour, and regarded it as "a lot more Andrew than me." *(Garbarini 1984, 42)* Fripp is listed as co-author of only half of the album's ten tracks.

The two albums contain some of Fripp's most immediately attractive and accessible music, the atmosphere is for the most part light and playfully adventurous. This listener finds it difficult to put a King Crimson album on the turntable without a certain fear and trembling: am I really up for this? But if a King Crimson record is a breast-beating Beethoven symphony, the Summers/Fripp collaborations are charming Mozart *divertimenti*, a little night music for enjoyment on a delightfully un-heavy level.

One directly senses the good time the musicians had making the music. The two guitarists were able to relax, tossing around ideas informally for a week with a cassette recorder before

beginning to record *I Advance Masked*. Summers reflected, "The usual thing is 'who takes the most leads?' That wasn't a problem because we had the whole album, and there was only the two of us, doing a lot of work and a lot of playing, so there were no ego problems. We were working towards a common goal." *(Darling 1982B, 50)* Fripp, who called Summers, "a lovely guitarist," saw the project as a third division (artistic research and development) venture, and as an opportunity: "It's the first time I've concentrated purely on being a guitar player since 1969." *(Grabel 1982, 58)*

The albums' emphasis on guitar sonorities opened the collaboration to comparison with other guitarists' efforts. Jon Young wrote in *Trouser Press* that "John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell and less acclaimed artists ... have done these things better before," *(Young 1982, 45)* while Lynden Barber peevishly commented in a *Melody Maker* review titled "Too Much Pussyfooting," "the dedicated guitarist would be better off buying, if a tasteful guitar album in the ECM style is required, a Ralph Towner record, or some Django Reinhardt if the interest is in virtuosity married to artistic brilliance." *(Barber 1982, 18)*

The music of *I Advance Masked*, all instrumental, ranges from structured improvisation over a disco-like beat to soft-edged fantasy soundscapes. Working to the album's advantage is the brevity of most of the pieces, their variety of color and mood.

A few annotations will suggest the profusion of ideas. In the title track, a sort of latter-day Discotronics foray, a "disco" bass drum keeps the beat of seven while Fripp's rapid-fire sixteenth-note lines contrast with Summers' concise rock-blues soloing. Some pieces, like "Under Bridges of Silence," sound like geographical Eno studies overlaid with plaintive reverbed/flanged cries from an electric guitar. A few develop in timbrally distinct sections, such as "China, Yellow Leaver," where slow waves of string synthesizer wash over Frippian ostinatos, the ostinatos drop out in the middle, leaving high shimmery synth tones and bagpipe guitar; a Frippertronic fade-in follows, then pentatonic short-note guitar riffs. "In the Cloud Forest" features Fripp's thoughtfully meandering melodic improvisations against a Summers chord backdrop.

Sometimes the experimental attitude produces results that don't seem to add up to much: in "New Marimba," layers of "disco" bass drum and a one-note bass, a fast Fripp ostinato, soloing, chord punctuations, and a long string line lead to nothing but pleasant tedium. In other pieces, such as "Hardy Country," Fripp's rock gamelan puts in a mild-mannered appearance, laid over with lush synth sounds, changing meters, and fresh chord progressions. "Painting and Dance" is a restrained, carefully worked-out electric guitar duet with an almost acoustic feel. *I Advance Masked* concludes with two particularly interesting experiments: in "Seven on Seven" a short rhythmic motif takes one through practically atonal excursions, and "Stultified" consists of oriental clanging timbres and jarring dissonances.

Some critics objected to the clean, glossy production job, as if careful recording practices had squeezed the life out of the music, but I have always thought of *I Advanced Masked* as possessing a certain sketchbook quality – the pieces are not so much compositions as fragmentary ideas in sound, and it is precisely that generous off-handedness that gives the album its breath and life.

Bewitched, as already noted, is as a whole more a product of Summers' imagination than Fripp's. Indeed, with Fripp subtracted from the formula, one realizes that Summers left to himself is primarily interested in tone color. Summers parades his pop leanings in "Parade," his penchant for distinctive rhythmic textures in "Train." He floats in the ambient in the very Enoesque "Forgotten Steps."

Side One of *Bewitched* is devoted to dance-rock-type pieces: the poppish “Parade”; the long “What Kind of Man Reads Playboy” by Summers and Fripp, featuring a somewhat obnoxious drum machine laying the foundation for alternating guitar solos, definitely a low-budget-jam-recorded-in-the-garage type of feel; and the almost Crimsoid “Begin the Day” by Summers and Fripp, a slasher with some trademark Fripp melodizing.

The seven pieces on Side Two are more adventurous – miniatures each with distinctive sounding surface and structural premise. While one may carp over the repetitiousness of a tune like Summers’ “Bewitched,” other tracks are stimulating enough, and they all work together as a very satisfying album side. Among the Summers/Fripp co-composed pieces, one might point to the dark atmosphere of the brooding minor/Phrygian “Tribe,” or to Summers’ lovely modal acoustic guitar melodies over Fripp’s low throaty backing guitar in “Maquillage” (possibly the first recorded piece to use Fripp’s “new standard tuning,” with its gutsy low C, a major third below the guitar’s normal sixth-string E – here prominently displayed as the tonic).

In all, the two Summers/Fripp albums show us the chemistry of two accomplished musicians at play. Unburdening themselves of the need to record music guaranteed to be mega-successful at the level of the Police or King Crimson, they produced a fine set of intimate *etudes* – diverse studies in guitar technique, early-1980s music technology, and musical nuance, with just enough reference to familiar rock rhythms and tonal practices to make them accessible to free rock spirits with open ears.

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Chapter Ten: Guitar Craft

Why does death catch us by surprise, and why love? We still and always want waking. We should amass half dressed in long lines like tribesmen and shake gourds at each other, to wake up: instead we watch television and miss the show.

– Annie Dillard

Birth of Guitar Craft

One day in late 1984 Robert Fripp sat in a room signing a stack of posters of the *Bewitched* cover for use in the record's publicity campaign. In the room were Andy Summers and Vic Garbarini, who had been dispatched from *Musician* magazine to do a joint interview with the two guitarists. Fripp was in a good mood, wryly reflecting on his work as a professional musician, saying that he hadn't thought being a musician involved sitting around signing posters. When the last of the hundred posters was signed, Fripp looked up with a beatific smile and announced, "I'm off to clean latrines in West Virginia!" *(Garbarini 1984, 38)*

It had been seven years since he had leaked back into the music industry in 1977, and Fripp, who with the posters and interview was completing his last official obligations, was ready for another sabbatical. He was about to enroll in a three-month residential course at the American Society for Continuous Education at Claymont Court, the 369-acre property of forest and farmland near Charles Town, West Virginia where Bennett had established the ASCE as a permanent community and school shortly before his death. As an early-1980s pamphlet outlining the ASCE's objectives explained, "The focus is on helping to restore an ecological balance to the environment and on creating conditions favorable for man's development in harmony with nature."

In addition to carrying on work in agriculture, horticulture, cottage industries, building, and alternative energy sources, the ASCE offered residential programs of up to nine months based on Gurdjieff's, Ouspensky's, and Bennett's methods as outlined in Chapter 7 of this book. Formal meetings, manual labor, spiritual exercises, work on the Gurdjieff movements, and study themes combined to place the student in a situation of personal growth and awareness of others. As the pamphlet said, "Every experience can be used to develop presence, intention, and balance between the inner and outer life. The Residential Program creates conditions which can lead to the threshold of genuine work beyond which the significance of life and one's own purpose become manifest."

(The ASCE has recently been renamed the CSCE – Claymont Society for Continuous Education – and as of this writing no longer offers long-term residential courses.)

In late 1984, with King Crimson IV behind him, Fripp had no further plans for working in bands; like ten years before, he had no specific plans at all, other than to go on his Claymont retreat and then to "let the future present itself." *(Garbarini 1984, 38)* As it turned out, the future presented itself with crystal clarity. Fripp had been involved with the operation of the ASCE since 1978, and had been on its board of directors since 1982. After his three-month retreat, Fripp was elected president of the ASCE, and was asked if he would give a few seminars based on music. (A regular feature of life at Claymont was then, as it is now, a variety of educational seminars led by permanent residents and also by outside speakers.) As Bob Gerber, current Chairman of the CSCE, who was in continuous contact with Fripp at this time, put it to me, Fripp said "no" to the idea of guitar seminars twice, then the third time realized this was something he was meant to do. Thus was Guitar Craft born.

(By 1990, Fripp was no longer officially involved with the CSCE; although Guitar Craft continues to offer seminars on the Claymont property, it is purely a business arrangement, Fripp renting space to house students and hold classes.)

Fripp had been thinking about teaching for many years, however. As far back as 1974, immediately after the breakup of King Crimson III, Fripp had spoken to *Rolling Stone* writer Ian Dove of his interest "in creating a new kind of guitar technique that is really working on three levels of being, heart, hands, and head. A way of life. More akin to yoga than formal guitar technique, actually an approach to living." He had gone on to speak with admiration of Pablo Casals, Yehudi Menuhin, and Ravi Shankar – musicians who through personal discipline had been able to achieve contact with higher energies. Most rock musicians, by way of contrast, Fripp had seen as "hopelessly inadequate, rooted to the earth ... thrashing around on stage using a very low-grade energy [which] comes from a very nasty quarter." *(Dove 1974, 14)*

In an interview with *Guitar Player*'s Steve Rosen, also from 1974, Fripp had talked about the importance of relaxation, of establishing a relationship between one's head and one's hands, of practicing "like hell" in order that the limitations of one's technique not get in the way of the free expression of ideas. "I suggest," he had said, "that guitar playing, in one sense, can be a way of uniting the body with the personality, with the soul and the spirit." *(Rosen 1974, 38)* All of these ideas would turn up much later in the context of Guitar Craft.

Long fascinated with both the mechanics of playing the plectrum guitar and with systematic means of coaxing the Muse out of hiding, Fripp had been searching for a teaching method, and he would press the musicians he came into contact with for their insights into their craft. When in 1982 Fripp interviewed his peer in picking, John McLaughlin, for *Musician* magazine, he repeatedly tried to get him to be more concrete about the way he worked on music. Both guitarists readily agreed on the importance of getting the ego out of the way in order to let music in, but Fripp wanted more details: "How do you get out of the way? Do you have specific techniques or regimens that you use? Can you just get yourself out of the way without thinking about it?" *(Fripp 1982B, 54)* McLaughlin's responses, although colorful and suggestive, were on the vague side. From conversations like this, Fripp had to be realizing that even the greatest musicians often operate intuitively, that is, using those parts of the mind which mere language does not easily penetrate – thus a musical genius may find himself or herself unable to articulate exactly what his or her inner processes consist of.

This may all be commonplace, but the position did not satisfy Fripp. If he were to have students, he had to be able to conceptualize, to concretize, to verbalize his relationship with music in order to pass it along. The method he came up with is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Elements of Guitar Craft

First, a few facts. The first Guitar Craft course was given at Claymont in March 1985. The original idea was to give three seminars of five-and-a-half days each, but due to unexpected demand the number of seminars was soon augmented to eight. At a certain point Fripp decided to make Guitar Craft a continuous, ongoing process, and as of this writing, without any signs of slowing up, there have been some thirty courses in the United States (mostly at Claymont but also in other locations), plus others in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and Norway. More than six hundred guitarists have participated in seminars, and the latest GC Directory, which serves to facilitate networking among active Crafties (the colloquial name for one who has

attended a seminar and keeps in touch), lists the addresses and phone numbers of over one hundred and sixty musicians. Fripp is the primary Guitar Craft teacher, but he is assisted by a number of experienced guitarists intimately familiar with his methods, and by non-musical teachers whose function will be explained in due course. The League of Crafty Guitarists, which represents the performing presence of Guitar Craft in the world, has played concerts in America, Europe, and Israel, and has released three albums, with plans for a fourth in the works.

As Guitar Craft has grown in size it has generated its own organizational infrastructure, complete with its own newsletter, literature (the *Guitar Craft Monograph* series), folklore, mythology, advertising, and merchandising (guitar accessories, decals, cassettes, bumper stickers, T-shirts, logos, and posters). For the seriously committed Crafty, Guitar Craft is indeed a whole way of life, centered on the discipline and practice of music.

Like all such groups which have passed beyond initial groping stages into existence as more or less streamlined organizations with a more or less strictly defined protocol, Guitar Craft has had its inner conflicts, and Fripp's control over the diffusion of his ideas has been less than total – on occasion he has had to chastise those enterprising yet unauthorized disciples who, after taking a seminar, have had the gall to bill themselves as bona fide Guitar Craft teachers for the sake of attracting private guitar students. Not that Fripp rules out any possibility of his students being teachers – to the contrary, as we shall see, he views teaching as its own genuine form of apprenticeship, a logical step for the committed musician. What he objects to is superficial students who greedily apply the imprimatur "Guitar Craft" to their own feeble methods, tapping into the iconic source without the requisite preparation.

It's an age-old story – disciples bringing grief to their teacher on account of having only dimly understood the teaching, and going out and telling the world all about it. It is a dilemma facing the discoverer of any great idea which is right for the times. Carl Jung disliked the idea of "Jungians," and dreaded the inevitable institutionalization of his insights: on the wall of the lobby at the Jung Institute of Los Angeles hangs a plaque quoting Jung which reads, "If you must have a Jung institute, for God's sake make it as disorganized as possible!"

In 1989 the forty-two-year-old Fripp called Guitar Craft his "life's work now." *(Drozdowski 1989, 29)* After a grueling public career battling the fickleness of public taste, critical fashion, and the music industry, and after harrowing experiences in bands which just could not seem to stay together but inexorably degenerated into yapping egos, Fripp could say, "Within Guitar Craft is the first time I've been able to live in a sane world." *(Drozdowski 1989, 32)* Fripp has always formed mental constructs and systems through which to channel his energies – King Crimson, the Drive to 1981, Frippertronics – and Guitar Craft is the grandest and most systematized of them all. Aside from his role as a teacher, Fripp personally gets a charge out of playing with students in his seminars: he says it "can be as good as King Crimson, playing in front of thousands of people." *(Milano 1985, 34)*

The goals and ideals of Guitar Craft are lofty enough. Fripp aims at no less than inaugurating a tradition of pedagogy for the flat-picked steel-stringed guitar. He believes that there is one best way to approach the mechanics of guitar playing, and that he has found it. He is quite uncompromising on this point: although sincere in his admiration for the likes of Hendrix, Beck, and Clapton *as musicians*, he is quick to find fault with the mechanics of their technique. Just examine any photograph of guitar heroes in action, he will say: right hands sloppily and inefficiently disported, left thumbs craning over the top of the fretboard. (Personally, I really doubt we would see so many of these wayward thumbs if there weren't some good reason for it. Fripp himself, though he'll bend a note here and there, doesn't use a whole lot of string-bending vibrato in his playing; if he did, he might find cradling the neck between the thumb and first

finger more effective than planting the thumb in the middle of the back of the neck, which is his recommended position.)

Along with the dissemination of a scientifically precise method of playing goes the creation of a new repertoire of exercises, etudes, compositions, and improvisational formats, all of which have grown and are continuing to grow organically out of Fripp's and his students' engagement with the playing technique, the new tuning Fripp invented and teaches to all Guitar Craft students, and the whole mind-set that goes along with Guitar Craft. The new repertoire is conceived as fulfilling more than a merely aesthetic function in the sense of new music for its own sake: it also fulfills a social purpose, bringing Crafties into a special relationship with each other through creating and practicing the music. As Fripp put it in 1987, "You can construct music in such a way on a purely structural and technical level that it pulls musicians together." *(Diliberto 1987, 52)*

Guitar Craft, like King Crimson before it, is conceived as a microcosm of society at large, or, perhaps more accurately, as one possible model blueprint of the inter-relationships in an ideal society. To put it somewhat less grandiosely, Guitar Craft music works by give-and-take, communal effort, selflessness, cooperation, and listening to others. Fripp has said, "If you wish to draw people together, get some of them playing in five and some of them playing in seven in a certain kind of way and it will inevitably draw them together while they're playing it. If when they leave that room they have been together in a certain kind of way, if only for a moment on the outside meshing together, perhaps they go back in and perform it again, and maybe something can come together on the inside. Well that begins to be *very* interesting stuff. Now imagine, just as a possibility, an idea of a repertoire of music which will guarantee, by its performance, to unify the people playing it. Even as an idea that's worth shooting for. I've seen it happen here [in Guitar Craft]." *(Diliberto 1987, 52)* This sounds very Platonic – Plato with his musical modes that had certain definite, inevitable effects on the human soul – and also echoes Gurdjieff's ideal of objective art.

In a recent interview, Fripp compared himself to thirteenth-century English carpenters who took large numbers of apprentices into their homes. Extending the analogy, he likened Crafties to anonymous cathedral builders of the late middle ages: "They didn't carve their names in the stones and leave testimonials to who they were because it would have gotten in the way." *(Diliberto 1987, 52)* Once again, the selfless and humble devotion to one's craft, the idea of working in the service of a purpose unimaginably greater than oneself. Jung had a similar idea, which he relates in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: he dreamed of the men and women of today working for consciousness as the myriad builders of an immense new cathedral of human fulfillment – each builder playing perhaps only a small, anonymous part, but nonetheless contributing significantly to the realization of the overall design. How long would the construction of this vast symbolic cathedral take? In Jung's view, about six hundred years.

In Guitar Craft courses, Fripp and his students use acoustic guitars exclusively. This is partly due to purely practical considerations – the prospect of fifteen, twenty, or more electric guitars simultaneously playing raises possibly insurmountable balance problems and equipment hassles. But there was more to the choice of acoustic instruments than that. Fripp's first guitar had been an acoustic, but in the early King Crimson years he had switched over to electric almost completely. In 1974, while allowing that the acoustic had a potentially lovely tone if properly played, he called acoustic guitar "an anachronism ... As a form of contemporary expression, the electric guitar is the only hope for the guitar at the moment as a creative instrument." *(Rosen 1974, 34)*

In the early 1980s, particularly in his work with King Crimson and Andy Summers, Fripp delved into the latest effects and guitar synthesizer technology. Like many guitarists, though, he was frustrated with the slight tracking delay of even the best guitar synths – and like many musicians, after initial flirtations with the awesome sound capabilities of MIDI rigs, Fripp seemed to come around to the conclusion that *music* is more important than *sound* – and that good music could not be purchased at the local electronics hardware/software store but was every bit as elusive as it had ever been. (Even Milton Babbitt, twelve-tone guru of the early RCA synthesizers of the 1950s and early 1960s, had concluded that "nothing gets boring so quickly as a new sound.")

Fripp also spoke of the disturbing distance, in playing an electric guitar, between the sound (coming out of an amplifier speaker somewhere) and its source (at the fingers of the guitarist). He said, "As soon as you plug in you have a state of 'schizophrenia.'" *(Diliberto 1987, 52)* This distance or schizophrenia was something a professional player could learn to work with, but only at some cost in terms of a sense of intimacy with the music.

In playing the acoustic guitar, the sound emanates directly from its source, and both are held close to the body, so that a certain direct proximity to the music inheres which is intrinsically impossible with an electric guitar. For the type of group playing practiced in Guitar Craft, it is vitally important for each player to be able to hear what everyone else is doing, for there to be no ambiguity between the sound and its source. Fripp settled on the acoustic Ovation Legend 1867, which features a gently rounded super-shallow body design that may be about as close to the shape and depth of an electric guitar as is possible without an intolerable loss of tone quality. Fripp liked the way the Ovation 1867 fitted against his body, which made it possible for him to assume the right-arm picking position he had developed using electric guitars over the years; on deeper-bodied guitars, the Frippian arm position is impossible without uncomfortable contortions, as I found out with my beloved Yamaha dreadnought. The Ovation 1867 also features a built-in pickup and graphic equalizer for use in performance situations where amplification is necessary; of course, the moment it is plugged in, the guitar no longer sounds like the guitar itself, but like the speakers it is running through, and the source/sound schizophrenia rears its head again. But – shall we say – life is full of compromises, and the Ovation 1867 has become the officially recommended Guitar Craft model.

So what is Guitar Craft? Perhaps I should have begun with the concise definition given in the 1989 Guitar Craft Services Brochure. "Guitar Craft," it is therein written, "is three things: 1) a way to develop a relationship with the guitar; 2) a way to develop a relationship with music; 3) a way to develop a relationship with oneself." The name Guitar *Craft* itself implies a certain concentration on the attainment of a level of competency in very practical terms. Competency may then pass into fluency, and fluency into mastery. But the emphasis in Guitar Craft is on concrete methods, not speculative metaphysics or "bright ideas" as they are known in Crafty folklore: as the Brochure goes on to say, "We approach the intangible by working on the tangible. At a certain point of application, of concentrated effort, craft becomes an art."

My Fripp Trip

I'm not sure whether I was a typical Crafty Guitarist. There's probably no such thing as a typical Crafty Guitarist – they're all quite emphatically individuals, though the school does seem to specialize in training white male rock guitarists in their twenties to transcend their self-imposed limitations. As explained in the Preface to this book, I had little intention of going to

Claymont in order to sit at Mr. Fripp's feet. I had an ulterior motive, which turned out to cause me no little discomfort during my week there – I was intent on "studying" Fripp and Guitar Craft as part of the research for my musicology dissertation. That was my own self-imposed limitation. I ended up getting, as the saying goes, far more than I'd bargained for.

Guitar Craft seminars are not cheap. The price tag on my five-day course was six hundred and twenty-five dollars, which I'd naively tried to finagle my way out of paying on grounds that I would be there as an observer, not as a participant. Fripp, over the phone to my home in California, testily rejected my request for financial absolution: "No, you *can't* get a reduced rate! If you're going to come here at all, you'll take part in the course along with everyone else." He later explained to the group the significance of the high cost of the seminars: this way, it would automatically mean something to those who came – if one is parting with six hundred and twenty-five dollars, plus plane and rail fare, one is bound to try to get as much as possible out of what is given in return.

Having sheepishly paid up, I received a form letter from Truus van Enckevort, who was Guitar Craft's administrative secretary of sorts: "Congratulations, you have been accepted to attend one of the Guitar Craft seminars." The letter gave instructions on how and when to get to Claymont and advised everyone to bring an acoustic steel-string guitar, extra strings, metronome, footstool, house shoes or sneakers, and a sleeping bag. There were also a couple of circulars from Fripp describing in general terms what we were in for: a week of guitar practice and other exercises in an old mansion that was funky but adequate. No drugs, it was painstakingly made clear, would be tolerated on the premises. We were asked not to play the guitar for one week prior to arrival.

At this time – late 1985, early 1986 – there had been very little publicity about Guitar Craft, and it all seemed very new and strange. In January 1986, *Guitar Player*'s Tom Mulhern came out with one of the first full-length Fripp interviews on the subject of Guitar Craft. One could not quite tell whether the Fripp on the magazine's cover – dressed in a natty suit and tie, hair slicked back, unshaven – was grinning or grimacing. He looked very old and strange.

Monday

Having knocked back several gin and tonics in the San Francisco International Airport lounge, I boarded the red-eye bound for Washington, D.C. It left at midnight, Sunday February 16 1986. In flight I guzzled more gin and tonics and fuzzily plowed my way through the interview by Mulhern, finally lapsing into a few hours of fitful sleep. As the airplane approached Washington by daylight, I careened into some semblance of awareness and craned my neck to see the enchanted West Virginia woods below, wondering if at some point I might be looking unknowingly at Claymont from the air. In Washington, laden down heavily with backpack and guitar, I successfully negotiated the subway system from the airport to the train station, stashed the guitar in a locker, and went out on foot through the crunchy snow to purchase a guitar stand. Having done so, through minor miracles of self-navigation, I wandered over to the White House, which I had seen on a family trip as a boy. It looked exactly the same, and the clarity of my memory startled me.

The Amtrak left Union Railway Station for Harper's Ferry, West Virginia at four-fifty-five P.M. Among the crowded commuters I spotted a number of scruffy young white males with guitars. One of the scruffiest, wearing one of the craziest hats I have ever seen – a floppy multicolored amalgamation of beret, fedora, and medieval clown's headgear – turned out to be

Matt Henderson, one of Fripp's assistant guitar teachers. As the train wound its way through warehouse wastelands and then through windy woodlands, I reclined back in my seat and managed to doze off.

At about six o'clock the Crafties-to-be disembarked en masse at Harper's Ferry, and in the wet snow and bitter cold were herded into several waiting station wagons and vans. As we drove through the gusty sleet in the dark along icy roads in an old beat-up overloaded car, I was so terrified of the hazardous conditions that I finally decided just to give up and relax – there wasn't anything I could do.

Providence had ordained safe passage, and we made it to the Claymont mansion, nestled in the woods about a mile off the highway at the end of a muddy dirt road covered with freezing rain. The somewhat isolated mansion, which has no permanent residents, was used by the ASCE for special events and seminars; the Claymont farm, bookstore, and residential community itself is located about a mile from the mansion.

Boots were left by the downstairs entrance, sneakers were donned, guitars sorted out. We looked for our room assignments on the bulletin board. Evidently quite by alphabetical accident, I was the only one who had been assigned his own room, everyone else was doubled or tripled up. I do cherish privacy – the luxury of being the only one to decide when to turn out the light – but in the present instance I felt strangely gypped, realizing that there would be whole scenes and conversations in the shared rooms that I wouldn't be part of.

The Claymont mansion, a grand specimen of late Colonial architecture, was built in 1820 by Bushrod Corbin Washington, great nephew of George Washington. The main floor is laid out with the kitchen and dining hall to the left, a "library" (with no books) and drawing room in the middle, a central entrance hall flanked by grand wrap-around stairways on either side, and a spacious ballroom with wood floor and tall windows to the right. The second and third floors contain the many bedrooms, and in the basement is a series of musty rooms including a sort of rec hall, a pay phone booth, and an old stone cold cellar with an ominous creaky rusty metal door. The mansion could stand several tens of thousands of dollars' worth of painting, carpentry, furnishings, plumbing, heating, and floor and window work – in fact one of the ASCE's ongoing projects is a complete renovation – but the place is basically functional and the level of physical comfort actually somewhat better than what I'd been led to believe by the pre-course circulars.

I got settled in my room near the right-hand stairway landing on the second floor, which shared a bathroom with an adjoining room, then went downstairs to the entrance hall where guitarists were milling around waiting for dinner. I gravitated to an old upright piano in the drawing room, idly thinking of the great jam sessions we'd be having in the days to come. Ideas started welling up in my mind for an improvisation on the spot – I wanted to impress everyone with my musical skills and knowledge – but before my fingers touched the keys, someone came over and said, "You know, Robert doesn't want anyone playing that piano during the course." I was somewhat crestfallen, but it made sense. I couldn't figure out, though, why the instrument wasn't simply locked up, or a sign put on it.

I stood around and chatted with other guitarists, but chit-chat not being my strong suit, I was shy and nervous, anxiously waiting for something to happen, for the course to begin, to get on with it.

At seven-thirty it was announced that dinner was served, and everyone filed into the dining hall. This was a large room with many windows, but with trees and bushes directly outside the windows, even during the daytime the room was on the dark side, an effect enhanced by the deep brown wood paneling. A row of sturdy wooden tables with benches on either side ran along

each wall; perpendicular to these rows, at one end of the room, was the head table where the teachers sat and ate, framed magisterially by the window to their backs, facing the roomful of pupils. And there, smack in the middle of this converging perspective, sat Robert Fripp aglow in candlelight, smiling bemusedly to himself, not appearing to be paying much attention to the students, but occasionally exchanging glances and jokes with subordinates to his right and left.

Throughout the seminar, the food – all vegetarian – was delicious, plentiful, and varied. It was expertly and sumptuously prepared and served by several elusive young women in their thirties (I believe they were residents of the Claymont community), who flitted about like ghosts amongst the heavily male-dominated proceedings. There was also a certain Virginia who was introduced as the "house mother." Of the twenty-six students in the Guitar Craft XII seminar, only two were women; their presence was a considerable blessing, since in my opinion they prevented things from developing into a locker-room/boys' club type of atmosphere.

We ate the food and continued with our nervous chit-chat. Toward the end of the meal, Robert tapped his glass with a fork and the dining hall fell silent. He welcomed us to Claymont and announced that there would be a meeting in the library at eight-forty-five, at which time our course – Guitar Craft XII, the twelfth seminar since Guitar Craft's inception a year previously – would be inaugurated. He outlined three conditions for participants. First, everyone must stay on the Claymont property for the duration of the seminar. Second, possession or use of drugs of any kind was forbidden. Third, he said with a grinning grimace, "If any of you indulge in the filthy, revolting, disgusting habit of smoking, you may do so only outside the building or downstairs in the cold cellar we affectionately call ... the Dungeon." He explained that agreement to these conditions was necessary for participation in the course, and that if anyone felt he or she could not abide by them, he or she could leave now with no disgrace.

Someone raised a hand and asked, "Are vitamins drugs?" Sly chuckles and meaningful glances between Robert and his assistant Bob Gerber. Scarcely able to contain his mirth, Robert said slowly and deliberately, "Well – I don't *know* if vitamins are drugs or not; but if you are asking whether you may *take* vitamins while you are here, the answer is yes." I realized that all the merriment was due to the inept form of the student's question; in fact, in the seminar as a whole quite a bit of energy was devoted to the idea of learning to speak precisely.

Robert closed his remarks with one of his seemingly endless supply of paradoxical aphorisms, which he tends to deliver in the quizzically assured cadences of the experienced story-teller. "Nothing is compulsory here," he said. "There is no such thing as making a mistake. Only one thing is compulsory, only one mistake: and that is not realizing your mistakes."

With that dinner was adjourned. Selected students cleared the tables and washed the dishes – this mild form of kitchen duty was done on a meal-by-meal volunteer basis. At eight-forty-five we gathered in the library, most of us sitting on the carpeted floor, some on a few folding chairs. Fripp sat on a chair in the corner furthest from the door, and announced that as one or two students had not yet shown up, the course could not begin; we would have to wait until the following morning.

I wandered around in jet-lag not knowing what to do. More than anything I wanted to play guitar, but that was out of the question until the following day. In the deserted, darkened dining hall were a couple of built-in shelves of old books, almanacs, and odd agricultural and technical journals behind glass doors. I found some trashy occult novel called *Firestarter* and retired to my room. I wrote down a few things in my journal. Lying back on the lumpy mattress over bumpy bedsprings, I read a few pages of the novel, fretting that I was paying a hundred bucks a day to do something completely meaningless. Soon I turned in.

Tuesday

I had made no arrangements to have anyone wake me up in time for the seven-thirty "morning relaxation" exercise, but was awakened at seven-thirty on the dot by a dream that I'd missed it already. I flew downstairs to the library, where everyone was sitting. The morning relaxations were led by a teacher from the Claymont community. In essence the idea was to relax and feel all the muscles of the body one by one, starting with the face and working systematically down. The teacher talked us through the routine, encouraging us to let our attention dwell on the specified area of the body, to feel the area from the inside. My initial difficulties with the exercise were physical: I have never learned how to sit on the floor, so after twenty minutes my back was in pain and both feet were asleep, my mind completely incapable of staying with the exercise. For subsequent relaxation sessions I arrived early and managed to get a folding chair so that I was able to sit somewhat more comfortably.

As anyone who has done any form of meditation is aware, to still the mind is a dauntingly difficult task, and what impressed me most about my experience with the relaxation exercise was the constant, ceaseless, involuntary churning of associations – the mind throwing up a continuous stream of thoughts, images, memories, anticipations, calculations, feelings – a fitful, troubled stream that has neither beginning nor end. Fripp puts great stock in the morning relaxation: in one of his recent newsletters he wrote that one cannot consider oneself a Crafty Guitarist without faithfully practicing it daily.

At breakfast – another feast, followed by coffee – Fripp declared Guitar Craft XII under way; the still-missing candidate, who had had some sort of travel mix-up, would simply have to catch up. At nine o'clock we twenty-five candidates and two assistant guitar teachers, Tony Geballe and Matt, gathered and seated ourselves on the folding chairs near the windowed walls of the spacious, high-ceilinged, light-flooded ballroom. Fripp, always poised and nimble on his feet, filtered silently into the room, black Ovation strapped to his body, took a look around, and said with mock exasperation, "I shall come back when you have rearranged yourselves intelligently." He went out. There was some discussion as to whether this meant to seat ourselves in rows, but Matt said Fripp simply wanted a neater circle.

This accomplished, the man floated in once more, surveyed the scene, took his place, and, standing relaxed in front of an empty chair situated along the center of one wall, spoke. "The new standard tuning is this: sixth string, C, a third below the old E; fifth string, G, a second below the old A; fourth string, D, the same as the old D; third string, A, a second above the old G; second string, E, same as the old first string; first string, G, a third above the old E. In other words, perfect fifths upward from the low C, with a G on top. Tune your guitars but do not yet play anything." Someone produced a battery-operated tuning device for use as a standard reference pitch, and we tuned. As my old Yamaha dreadnought assumed, string by string, an entirely new and different sound, I grew increasingly amazed at the impeccable logic and sheer sonority of the new tuning.

When tuning was completed, Fripp said, "Good. Now, pick a note from the following series – [it was a series of fourths or fifths]. *When you are ready* – do not be in any hurry, but *when you are ready* – play your note, then pick others and play them as the situation demands it. Your first note will be the first *intentional* note you have played in a week."

I was ready to savor at least half a minute or so of luscious silence, preparing myself and reflecting on the opportunity Fripp had given us to hear something we had never heard before,

made all the more fresh by a week's abstention from guitar playing. But no more than five seconds after the words left Fripp's mouth, the resonant ballroom was filled with a jangling clamor of riffs, harmonics, bass notes, chords. I was shocked. "They just don't appreciate!," I said to myself. But soon this passed, and after a time I chimed in with my notes. And the jangling clamor of more than two dozen re-tuned guitars all playing at random – it was ... beautiful.

From the outset, Fripp exercised an uncanny control over his classes. When he wanted something done, the students did it. When he wanted something stopped, he could stop it. A mere gesture, a wave of the hand, or a softly-spoken "Leave it," would bring our thrashing to an instantaneous halt. I admired this charismatic leadership quality, especially when I considered my classroom presence among my own students – a presence, I thought, so exceedingly feeble and wimpy by comparison.

It was with some such powerfully understated gesture that Fripp brought our joyful jangling to a close, and then systematically began work on the mechanics of guitar playing. In Level One seminars like GC XII, the emphasis is on how to play rather than what to play. (The other levels of Guitar Craft will be discussed in due course.) That is, Fripp is concerned to get the guitarist sitting up straight – itself an awesomely difficult proposition with some students – with the guitar in the proper position, with the left and right hands disposed correctly. For most guitarists, this involves having to discard years of bad habits either accumulated unconsciously or cultivated actively by teachers Fripp would view as misguided.

Fripp began with the left hand, having us spend some time relaxing and attempting to feel the life inside the hand. He gave us a chromatic "walking" fingering exercise for the left hand, which we played in unison up and down the strings. Always, Fripp would stress, we were to play "with intention." Everything was learned by rote, by direct imitation. He would explain an exercise, have us try it, and walk around the circle, guitar strapped on, intently observing each student and giving out individual words of instruction – and encouragement, of a sort. His favorite technique involved tongue-in-cheek ridicule: "Wretched!" he would gleefully say, "But not hopeless."

Fripp forbade cassette recorders and note-taking during his lectures and guitar teaching. His explanation: "If you must write it down, you haven't really learned it." Being possessed of a perhaps excessively literary consciousness myself, I didn't find in Fripp's logic much to recommend it, and circumvented the prohibition by dashing back to my room at intervals and feverishly scribbling down on a legal pad everything significant I could remember.

Each day of the seminar would include two or more lengthy group guitar lessons with Fripp, lessons which gradually evolved from working on simple – but not easy – position exercises to learning several rather involved polyphonic compositions for the ensemble.

Another daily feature of the course was work with Frank Sheldon, an accredited teacher of the Alexander Technique. The very first Guitar Craft seminars included some yoga exercises, but Fripp soon concluded that the Alexander Technique was more effective and accessible. F.W. Alexander was a British actor who spent his life observing his posture and that of others, and training teachers to spread his methods. The Alexander Technique begins (and ultimately ends, I suppose) with simple – yet not easy – awareness of what one is doing: what bodily positions are habitual, the location of unnecessary tension, finding one's center of gravity, experiencing natural lightness, balance, poise. The technique has been widely used for decades among musicians, dancers, and actors. A minimum of three years' training is required of prospective instructors.

Much of our work with Sheldon was directly connected with our guitar practice: how to find a comfortable, relaxed sitting position in which it would be possible to practice for hours on

end without getting stiff. But Sheldon also used a variety of games as tools for observation. One game was like the one where a whispered message passed from mouth to ear gets progressively garbled until at the other end of the line it bears no resemblance to the original – except that Sheldon had us do the game in bodily movement. Ten people stood in a line, and the first one did some simple motions observed by the second. The second person then turned around and tried to duplicate the motion of the first; the third person mimicked the second, and so on. By the end of the line, lo and behold, the original motions were utterly lost, replaced by a hideous accumulation of habitual gestures of self-consciousness and startling. Through such means Sheldon encouraged us to become aware of the power of habit and to begin a long process of self-observation.

The first big group lesson in the Alexander Technique was Tuesday at noon. Subsequently, throughout the afternoon, Sheldon met with small groups of four or five, assessing every person's individual standing posture. I have never been particularly pleased with my body image, but was quite unprepared for the revelations Sheldon's analysis gave me – such as the fact that I had been going through life with my head tilted upward, nose literally stuck up in the air, and had accepted this as a normal position. Sheldon gently tilted my head forward until everyone in the room agreed it was now straight. He asked me how it felt. I said, "It feels like I'm staring at the ground!" And so it did. This experience was one of many such insights I received at the seminar – insights that came like a flash, in moments of "Aha!" that would be followed by months and years of follow-up work and probing into their meaning.

The night before I had been reduced to doing nothing; the moment the course began, it seemed there was not enough time for anything, so rich was the mixture of ideas, exercises, and projects. I was cast into a state of nervous excitement and seemingly limitless energy (I'm sure the coffee from the ever-present urn in the dining room didn't hurt). Fripp said at one point, "I know that if I had been given this opportunity as a young guitarist, I would have spent the week getting along on two to four hours' sleep a night." All my life I had conditioned myself to think that with any less than eight hours of sleep, the day would be a groggy disaster. With four to six hours a night at Claymont, I felt supremely awake and alert. Big Jim, a fellow student, said to me later in the week as we were washing dishes, "At home I sleep eight hours and stay tired all day long; here I sleep four and never felt better."

As is well known to ascetics and sleep-research scientists, prolonged sleep deprivation does funny things to the head. While many people can get by with less sleep than they think they need, there comes a point when mental processing takes a turn for the fantastic – what it boils down to, I think, is that you essentially start to dream while you are awake. Deep wells of emotion and images open up and you plunge into them. It can take on an aura of mystic revelation, or conversely, the horrors of hell. I had a bit of both during my week at Claymont. On Tuesday afternoon the journey was just beginning.

Every student met with Fripp each day for a fifteen-minute individual lesson. As a one-on-one teacher, I found him warm and inviting, in a businesslike sort of way – always dryly funny, always "on" in the sense of being vividly, completely alive, able to devote his complete attention to the matter at hand, completely *there* with the student. In a word, present. He was supremely confident and at the same time gave the impression of caring about, or at least taking an active interest in, the student's development. In my first lesson he gave me a set of permutations on the left-hand chromatic exercise introduced that morning. Although I'd played guitar for some twenty years, I'd always been a rhythm, never a lead player, and some eighty percent of the Guitar Craft exercises and repertoire are based on single plucked notes and melodic lines. Even though my left hand, in Fripp's estimation, was not a complete disaster, I had to struggle mightily with the fingerings.

And struggle I did, practicing guitar in every available moment. But there was a dilemma, one which never was completely resolved. Fripp's method is to have the student start by working on guitar mechanics, devoting full attention to every physical detail of one's playing technique. And I could see the value of that approach. The problem, or dilemma, was that I had never approached music that way. When I taught myself to play guitar, I listened intently, but paid not the slightest attention to physical technique, other than to hit the right notes cleanly at the right time. I judged things by whether or not they sounded right, and over the years had developed what I fancied was a technique commensurate with, or at least minimally sufficient for, what I needed to express.

Now all this was being called into question. I wanted to explore this wondrous new tuning, to *play* with it, to improvise, to listen to it, to approach it in terms of music theory, ideas, *music*; but Fripp seemed to be saying no, you've got to do all this nasty physical stuff first, much of which seemed unnatural to me, opposed to my own physical instincts for the guitar developed over a twenty-year period. I never did resolve that dilemma, but accommodated it by dividing my practice time between working (the nasty physical stuff) and playing (the rhapsodic improvising). Once or twice the two came together for a few brief minutes. I imagined, and still imagine today, that with a few years of work the two could merge quite nicely. I never got that far. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

After dinner Tuesday evening I called my wife and daughter at home, then repaired to my room to write in my journal that in talking to them I "realized how being at Claymont has totally enveloped my consciousness, normal consciousness is, after all, a transient, ephemeral set of coherences and relationships. I have been struck by how differently and how strongly different people pick up on some part of my persona, or simply find something in me on which to hang their psychic hat – and then don't let me be myself, or rather refuse to see anything in me other than that single projection."

In the journal lines that followed, I immediately indulged in some ungenerous projections of my own: "I am also a little sleazed out by the personal qualities of Tony and Frank Sheldon. [Tony Geballe had this irritating sort of glazed-over expression – he would sit in the circle of guitarists, playing along effortlessly while wearing what I saw as the countenance of a blissed-out zombie. Sheldon, for all I was learning from him about my own body image, moved like a cadaver – slowly, carefully, oh-so-perfectly: I sometimes wanted to kick him and scream, "Can't you forget all that Alexander shit for just one minute and walk like a real person!"] Also, I wonder why everything about this place is so veiled – why people don't seem to ever give you a straight, honest, *real* answer." This last bit, as I recall, was mostly in reference to attempts at conversation with Bob Gerber, whom I was finding evasive, distant, and less than sensitive to the urgency and sincerity of my questions about Guitar Craft, Claymont, and everything involved.

That evening Tony led a group guitar session devoted to a simple – yet demanding – right-hand cross-picking exercise on the notes D-A-A-A. We didn't know it at the time, but many of these little exercise fragments we were being given one by one would later in the week be brought together and blossom into the most spectacular polyphonic music.

At nine or nine-thirty Fripp gathered us in the library for the "First Innaugural Session," during which we students introduced ourselves one by one. It was a motley, fascinating, and loveable group indeed. I remember many of the faces but have forgotten most of the names; in the present account the students' names are fictitious, except in a couple of cases where I have been able to contact them and obtain permission to use their real names. The two women naturally stood out – good-natured Karen from central California, laughing all the time and looking like an elegant bar queen; and quiet, blue-jeaned, plaid-shirted Annie from somewhere in

the near-local mountain regions, looking like the fiddler in a stomping square-dance band. Young, lively, innocent Arnie, who later sincerely gave me a flyer for est or some such; robust, hairy Big Jim, who went around all day looking like a psychotic slob in a dirty T-shirt, eyebrows knitted and tongue hanging out; Chester the jester, a sort of Bill Murray type who could do all sorts of hilarious imitations, from "Saturday Night Live" to the various Guitar Craft teachers; John the handsome virtuoso, whose fingers flew up and down the frets with superhuman agility and grace (once when I complimented him he shrugged it off); Penguin Joe, another accomplished player who one sleepless night made a cassette tape of Big Jim's unbelievably noisy and prolific snoring for all to hear; Zaven the precocious spiritualist, with a dark, flashing middle-Eastern appearance and a certain attitude about himself; Cowboy Bob, who seemed increasingly agitated and out of touch as the course went on and ended up leaving a day or two early. The atmosphere of the course was so intense, so all-consuming – Penguin Joe compared it to an acid trip – that one evening at dinner Arnie wondered aloud seriously about the possibility of cracking, that is, going over the edge, breaking down under the strain. Fripp said, seriously but matter-of-factly, "We've had two," meaning since the beginning of Guitar Craft a year previously. He explained that one reason for all the teachers and individual appointments was so the students would be under careful continuous observation from a number of different viewpoints; the teachers met on a daily basis to discuss the status of potential burn-out or freak-out cases.

There was goateed Dick Bannister the firecracker, intense, wiry, energetic, and a fabulous improviser, overflowing with ideas, as I was to find out; bearded Steve Patterson the psychologist, at forty the oldest student on the course, thoughtful and kind; jump-suited Phil who dreamed strange dreams, more on which anon; tall, lanky heavy metal Rod, who seemed to keep to himself pretty much, and who was one of the few Crafties to employ the Dungeon; one-legged Tom, who played lead guitar in some kind of experimental rock dance band in Texas; Ray Jung from Schenectady, New York, Asian in appearance and deeply devoted to creativity and music; the gentle bearlike Bob Gerber, who although acting in the capacity of a teacher as regards the "Systematics of Music" (discussed below), was a beginning guitarist and participated in the guitar lessons as a student.

These, myself, and nine others comprised the Guitar Craft XII student body, and I have no doubt that were one to ask them all what happened that week at Claymont, one would get twenty-six different answers.

When, Tuesday night at the library session, it came round my turn to introduce myself, I didn't know what to say. Though I appreciate their function, I always hate these affairs – summarize your life and being in two sentences or less. I said something nondescript about being a keyboard player who happened to be also a guitarist who had liked King Crimson from way back when. Fripp made matters worse for me by saying, after my brief recalcitrant soliloquy, "I think it's only fair to say that Eric is a musicologist who came here with the intent of writing his dissertation about my music." He said it, or at least I heard it, with that slightly malicious, sadistic, yet innocently veiled sarcasm at which he must be the world specialist.

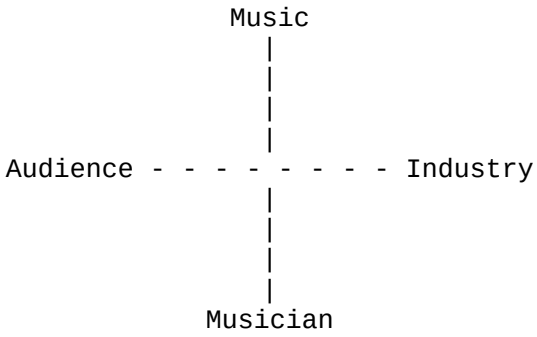
The reason this made matters worse from my point of view was that I had wanted to blend in and be unobtrusive – the better to observe, and, as it was rapidly turning out, to learn. So Fripp blew my cover, which he had every right to do – I was in the wrong for having fancied, without having thought it through too clearly, that I could drift in and dissect Guitar Craft by stealth. The uncovering put me in a personally uncomfortable position, because the last stereotype I wanted hung around my neck was "musicologist." As it turned out, the Crafties I spoke to had few hangups about musicology: they didn't know enough about the discipline to have savored all of

its unsavory elements: the cultural tunnel-vision, the reams of meaningless statistical scholarship, the relentless pursuit of mediocrity, the flawed "objectivity," the detachment from the real world of real music – all of which I'd been in the thick of for several years in my role as a lowly graduate student. On the contrary, the Crafties who took any note at all of Robert's introduction of me accorded me a respect and deference which I neither deserved nor wanted. I did find myself occasionally cast against my will into the role of the defender of classical music, running up against the prejudice, fervently fanned by Fripp, of the rocker who views the orchestral player as a mere automaton who never expresses himself.

Was it all mind games? Petty insignificances blown up into mountainous proportions? "Very perhaps," or "tres peut-etre," as Gurdjieff used to say in his broken French, meaning "quite possibly." But the point here is the sense that under the conditions of a Guitar Craft seminar, I was beginning to get an unusually clear sense of myself precisely through being forced to confront aspects of my personality, motivations, and role-playing which in normal life I'd just as soon ignore. Under the conditions imposed by a teacher, Gurdjieff said, the student is able to step out of habitual roles and for a moment become himself. And that self, it often happens, is nothing like what one ordinarily believes, expects, or desires.

Fripp, poised and alert in his corner chair, proceeded to lead a discussion. It is difficult to reproduce on paper the real sense of such events – so much of their significance seemed to lie in the tone, the underlying strata of meaning, the very presence of the man who for a week was stepping into the role of teacher. Fripp told the story of his dozing in a friend's Chelsea loft in the early 1980s. He leapt from the sofa with a sudden realization. "Music stands at the door and knocks," he said. "One day we hear it faintly, but by the time we get through all the junk on our floor, it is gone. So we clean up the mess. Next time, we answer the door and meet it, but the house has such a stench that it goes away. Finally we set our house in order, because ..." and here Fripp did one of his *long pauses*, turned his eyes down to the mid-foreground, and grew visibly grave and saddened ... "because we just couldn't bear for it to go away and not return," these last words pronounced in a quiet, slightly wavering voice. It took him a few minutes to recover from the thought; he appeared disoriented and shaken.

There followed an initial presentation of the "four terms" of music, which Fripp encouraged us to visualize in a cross as follows:



This was an introduction to the "Systematics of Music," a subject upon which Bob Gerber was to expound at great length over the next several days, and which initially left me, and still leaves me, rather cold. Later I wrote in my journal: "I don't know if I will ever swallow Fripp's guitar techniques, his four-term system, his dismissal of written music ... but just being here may drive me to myself."

The lecture/discussion was adjourned around eleven o'clock. Fripp spirited himself away, perhaps to his quarters on the second floor hallway near mine. Some students went off to find quiet nooks in the spacious mansion where they could practice. Some went downstairs to the basement rec room, where English beer was being served up on tap by one of those ghostly Claymont kitchen workers. There was little prospect of getting buzzed, as the brew was doled out so conspicuously and under such close observation – it was a civilized, nourishing, relaxing quaff at the end of a hard day. Some students formed little discussion groups in the living quarters, getting to know each other and reflecting on the day's events – it was still only Day One, but a universe of time seemed to have elapsed since twenty-four hours before. Some perhaps went to bed.

I found quiet in the darkened dining hall, lit only by light emanating from the adjacent hallway to the lobby. The wooden tables and benches were cleared, empty, their finish dimly glossy in the darkness. The glass-fronted bookshelves where the night before I'd picked up the trashy novel had now a different countenance – utterly useless, in view of the profound work to be done. The coffee urn, and the hot water urn for tea – a selection of regular and herbal teas being provided – stood on a table in the foyer between the dining hall and the hallway. People would occasionally drift in, hellos would be exchanged – what to say? – take their drinks and drift out. I sat, sometimes on a table, sometimes on a bench using my footstool to support my right leg.

I played guitar. The exercises, the germinal fragments of pieces-soon-to-be, everything I could remember of all that had been given in the day's group lessons and my private lesson with Robert. I explored the new tuning, strumming the open strings one by one, top to bottom, bottom to top, feeling my way amongst scale possibilities, harmonic possibilities. What unfamiliarity! What newness! What as yet unheard music lay locked in this acoustically self-evident yet so unrecognized disposition of six steel strings stretched across a box of wood?

I did not know how to practice or what to practice, but I *was* practicing ... something. The silhouetted shape and visage of Matt appeared as I was playing. I said, "My fingers hurt." He said, "Good – that means you're working." He disappeared. I left the confines of the physical guitar exercises and just played. Something – music? – poured out. In the strange newness of the fingerings and the tuning – the tuning being based on that eternal archetype of music, the perfect fifth ratio 2:3 – I heard something, a quality as if eternally present and yet forgotten, a union of the physical, emotional, and intellectual, the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic. It was a quality that was *there* – all you had to do was hold out your hand. Ask and ye shall receive.

Looking back and remembering, re-living this now, it was like the trajectory of a rocket. On Tuesday night in the darkened dining hall I felt the force of multiple G's pressing me back in my capsuled seat. In terms of sheer energy, Tuesday night was a high point, never to be recaptured. In the days to come, the force of take-off lessened bit by bit, and I settled into the arc of a spaceship ultimately bound for earth.

Wednesday

I got up, went to the ballroom, played guitar, and at seven-ten wrote blandly in my journal: "I practiced in the dining room until about midnight last night, and had a couple of good improvs in the new tuning, which does appear to have certain possibilities. Noises kept me awake until probably at least one o'clock. I woke up at about six-fifteen and decided to stay up, as a guy in the next room was taking a shower anyway, and the guy upstairs was apparently moving furniture. I've been practicing down here in the ballroom. A strange mind-set is overtaking me."

Morning relaxation, breakfast, and a group guitar lesson with Fripp followed as the day before. He began the group lesson with a sort of improvisational exercise: "Pick a note from the following: A, B, C, D, E, F#, G [an A-Dorian scale]. When you are ready, play that note. Then pick another note from the same series. Play that second note as the situation demands it. And so on." While I felt we failed miserably in terms of really listening to each other and adapting our notes to each others', there was yet such a fullsome quality in the resulting Dorian cacophony that I couldn't help but be impressed.

The evening before, Fripp had surveyed our picking with exaggerated displays of displeasure and woe, and announced, "Your left hands are extremely bad, but your right hands are *infinitely* worse." He had proceeded to introduce us to the correct way to hold the pick, the correct angles of the arm, wrist, and hand, and so on.

In the Wednesday morning class Fripp complimented us on the improvement in our right-hand technique since the night before, and went on to introduce a new cross-picking exercise – a slow mournful arpeggio that would become the backing rhythm for one of the "Guitar Craft Themes." Fripp walked around, always nimble and poised, drolly doling out advice: "The thumb is never bent, always straight. If your thumb is bent, you are *in error*." As we did the exercise in pathetically accelerating unison, Fripp would zero in on someone and yell, "Why is your thumb bent?!"

Fripp teaches that there is one true ideal tone color for the acoustic guitar, produced by plucking the strings directly over the sound-hole, with the plane of the pick immaculately parallel to the line of the strings. I found this difficult to accept. For one thing, it was impossible to do on my guitar: the Yamaha's body was too deep and its top too large for me to locate the pick in precisely the right place with the angles of arm, wrist, and hand coordinated in the approved manner. In a private lesson, Fripp acknowledged this, and suggested I get a smaller guitar. Well, fine. But one particular pleasure of the week at Claymont was the opportunity to wander around and borrow Crafties' guitars that were not in use. I played Ovations, Martins, Guilds, Gibsons, funky old cowboy guitars, unfamiliar makes. I studied each one's tone and playability carefully. I came to the conclusion that my 1977 Yamaha FG-295S, a made-in-Taiwan copy of a Gibson Hummingbird, sounded the best of them all: precisely because it was so gigantic, it put out the clearest, most resonant, loudest, most balanced, and overall just the most beautiful tone.

Surely I was prejudiced. But after twenty years as a guitarist, I was starting to trust my own judgement. And that is one thing Guitar Craft was supposed to be about. As Gurdjieff would say, "Accept nothing you cannot verify for yourself." Furthermore, my style of playing was based to a large degree on giving life to the tone by deliberately playing on different parts of the strings, with different pick angles, all the way up to scraping the string with the side of the pick so that each pitch is preceded by a little percussive scratch, or snapping the strings against the fingerboard. The Guitar Craft method of playing was asking me to give all this up in favor of production of an idealized tone – a tone which, to the extent that I could produce it, I did have to admit had a certain gorgeous classical roundness to it. So although I had serious doubts, I persevered in the exercises as best I could.

After lunch Fripp called a meeting in the library, and announced the "challenge" of the course. He had arranged, he said, for Guitar Craft to give a public performance the following night, at a drinking establishment in Charles Town. We Crafties were to form ourselves into small groups of four or five, each group to compose a ten-to-fifteen minute set of material. We were to practice the material and work on its presentation. We had twenty-eight hours to do this – effectively much less time than that, given all the scheduled lessons, meetings, Alexander sessions, meals, and the need for at least a few hours of shut-eye. Fripp painted a gloomy picture,

trying his best to scare the crap out of us. “There is nothing like exposure to public ridicule to galvanize the attention,” he intoned. He was less than forthcoming as to the precise nature of the venue, alerting us only to the hazards of playing music for uncomprehending foot-stompers who were under the influence of alcohol. A brave Crafty ventured to ask what the name of the place was. Little cause for solace was to be found in Fripp’s reply. Raising one eyebrow menacingly and screwing up his face in best Vincent Price fashion, he drawled out slowly, “The Iron Rail.”

“I must warn you,” Fripp gravely continued. “You may be heckled by a loud drunk ... sitting right next to you ... *it may be me*.” As the challenge, in all its dubious glory, slowly sank into our baffled awareness, Fripp was unable to contain his smug demented levity. He chuckled happily to himself, tears almost coming to his eyes. “It’s a great challenge,” he said to no one in particular. “A wonderful challenge.” We sat speechless.

After the meeting we ran off in terror to form our groups. To appreciate the nature of our fear and loathing, consider that it had been only the previous morning that we had tuned our guitars to the new standard tuning for the first time, and hence were still struggling to remember or figure out basic things like where the notes were, where middle C was, how to finger a simple major scale, and so on. It would be like a saxophone player waking up one morning to find that someone has rearranged all the holes and fingering keys on his sax, so that the notes make no sense, aren’t where they used to be. It would be like someone introducing you to an unfamiliar language with a strange alphabet one day, and the next day telling you that the following day you were to give a lengthy public recital, from memory, of an original poetic thesis on the new language’s grammar – in the new language.

Perhaps I, with my theoretical bent, my tendency to want to *know* before I *do*, was more terrified than most of the other Crafties. But the challenge kicked our already feverish activity into a new gear.

My group consisted of Big Jim, jump-suited Phil, California Karen, myself, and Tim Bauman the novice. We had some preliminary discussions in the afternoon, but as I recall our first major rehearsal took place after the day’s official activities were over, beginning around eight P.M. and lasting until close to midnight. I will describe it in a moment.

At around five in the afternoon I had my daily individual lesson with Fripp. He gave lessons in his quarters, which were only slightly more spacious than the Crafties’ – from the looks of it, a single room that served as office, teaching studio, and bedroom. I seem to remember a high ceiling and bamboo mats on the floor or walls. The room was filled with light from the windows. There were a couple of framed prints or watercolors on the walls, and a small laptop personal computer on a writing desk. He gave the lessons in a chair facing the student’s chair.

Today we did not play guitar, but talked about my proposed dissertation. After the meeting I wrote in my journal: “He said (not necessarily in this order) that he would still try to dissuade me from writing about him. He said he had worked with Bruford for twelve years and Bruford *still* didn’t know what he [Fripp] was trying to do. How then could I, an outsider who had never been with him on tour and so on, hope to get any feel for his musical life and working methods? He described experiences of trying to communicate with his musicians by direct telepathy, such as projecting himself psychically into his drummer’s body and seeing directly – literally, not metaphorically – through his drummer’s eyes. The whole Western approach was different from his; his approach was more like the way kids learned gamelan music in Bali – as part of a vivid social context, a whole life-experience that did not divorce art from life itself. He said that at this point in time he’d rather nothing was said about his music: he used to want to be famous and all that, but now he doesn’t need any more publicity. The things written about him

have mostly been wrong, he said. We talked a bit about non-verbal communication, the difference between reading an interview and talking to someone in person. I said he came across very differently in person than in print, and he concurred."

In between official functions and meals, I was practicing guitar at every available moment, as were many of the other Crafties. Every day, the Claymont mansion was filled with music from early morning until late at night.

At six o'clock Bob Gerber led a discussion on the "Systematics of Music" in the library. Some of this material has subsequently been published in the Guitar Craft Monograph series. (See the Bibliography at the back of this book, under "Guitar Craft"; the moving force behind the "Systematics" was, however, Gerber, current Chairman of the Claymont Society for Continuous Education, who has been one of Guitar Craft's assistant teachers from the very first seminar, and whose articles on Systematics are listed in the Bibliography.)

In February 1986 the Systematic approach was all still very new and unfamiliar. The Systematics of Music consists of an elaborate theoretical framework within which the four fundamental "terms" of music – music, performer, audience, and industry – can be grasped in their multiple aspects, combinations, and inter-relationships. For the sake of relative simplicity, our Systematics sessions with Gerber left out the "industry" term and labored to understand simply music, performer, and audience.

At first I found the whole system farcical, and thought it was a colossal waste of time and energy. Gerber's method involved writing equations using the terms on a little blackboard and then asking the group such brain-teasing questions as, "If music, by means of the performer, attains the potential of the audience, then whom does music as a demand challenge the craftsman's skill to reach?" (Answer: the critic.) I objected to the system because it seemed preposterously arcane, unreasonably and unnecessarily difficult, and, perhaps most important of all, it seemed dubious, ill-informed, and misleading from a world-music or ethnomusicological point of view: it seemed to me that many musical cultures of the world simply do not have such rigid dividing lines between musician, audience, critic, industry, and so on. Scholars like John Blacking, who researched Venda music in South Africa, had come to the conclusion that the musical "division of labor" into distinct audience, composer, and performer roles in "advanced" Western societies was by no means the global norm, but rather a kind of aberration of technological civilization, symptomatic of our warped values.

Near the beginning of the Systematics discussions I voiced some of these criticisms, partly because I believed them to be valid, and partly in an effort to broaden the discussion out onto a more philosophical, less picayune level. I saw some danger in this particular form of indoctrination, which I called "psychological terror tactics" in my journal: I felt that some Crafties might lapse into simply accepting Systematics as some sort of revealed gospel truth. Gerber basically ignored my passionate comments and went back to his formulas, pulling answers like impacted wisdom teeth out of the mouths of the student body. I shut up and irritatedly kept listening, trying to follow the Byzantine logic of the music-performer-audience equations, all the while wanting most of all just to cut out and play my guitar.

As an intellectual theory, the Systematics of Music reminds me very much of Ouspensky's interminable explications of Gurdjieff's law of octaves and myriad forms of hydrogens: tedious, inelegant, forced, and not worth the effort to even try and understand. I came to think, though, that the whole point of the Systematics discussions was perhaps not so much the result – the theory itself – as the process of arriving at the theory. Gerber did lead the discussion along certain pre-determined lines, but he was sincere in his desire to have the *students* construct

the theory piece by piece as he went along. In other words, it was all an exercise in learning how to think logically, given a certain set of terms each endowed with experiential value. And as such, for some Crafties it may have served its purpose. As for Systematics' being ethnocentric, well, I figured most Crafties would be working in the Western world anyway.

At dinner, my table was talking about Gerber's Systematics when Fripp tinkled his glass and announced that the late student, Jay, had just arrived, having missed a day and a half, and wanted to know what had already happened. Jay was seated to Fripp's left at the head table. "So," Fripp dead-panned, "Can someone please tell him what has happened?" This drew a burst of laughter from the troops, since it was painfully obvious to all that a three-sentence summary of what seemed like a universe of time, events, and mind-trips was totally impossible. But some brave soul did manage to rise and say a few words.

After more eating, Fripp rang his glass and said with feigned gravity, "Did anyone *notice* anything today?" What a question. A long pause as our minds raced up and down labyrinths, thinking of things we had "noticed," trying to figure out just *what the hell* the man was asking for. I was speculating to myself that he was talking about special moments when the stream of associations is stopped in its tracks by some inner or outer phenomenon and one is forced to become particularly aware of oneself, when young Arnie got up and spoke.

"I went out for a walk this afternoon," he said. "I went through the woods over to the Claymont community where the farm is. Everything was so beautiful in the cold and the snow. I saw a line of ducks walking along. Then, as I was walking back to the mansion, there was a cow behind a fence. And I looked at this cow, just an ordinary cow ... and it turned its head ... and ... and I noticed ... *I noticed that the cow was staring at me*!" Gales of laughter from the assemblage.

Arnie went on. "This cow was looking straight at me, and I was looking straight back at it, and it kept staring at me, and I turned to walk away, but even as I walked away I kept looking back, and it was still staring at me!" Arnie was growing animated, emotional. He was nervously laughing but he was close to tears. Clearly he had had some kind of primal or peak experience. Finally he said, in a quavering voice, directly to Robert, "So this cow was staring at me, even when I was walking away. What ... what does it mean?"

Nervous guffaws from the Crafties, then a pregnant pause. The atmosphere was electric. It was one of those close-to-the-edge moments. Fripp took the situation in hand. "Well," he said with gentle irony, looking good-humoredly at Arnie, "It probably means the cow was looking at this turkey walking down the road, wondering, 'Why is that turkey staring at *me*?'" Explosions of laughter. All tension defused. Fripp was a master at this sort of thing.

More people offered interesting observations on what they had "noticed," and were bombarded with questions from Fripp as to every last detail of their experiences.

At length Fripp posed another question: "Did anyone ... get *irritated* today?" The concept of "irritation" enjoys a special status in Guitar Craft folklore/mythology. Irritation is what lets you know you're alive, or at least one thing that does so. Irritation with other people is an opportunity to work on oneself. In Jungian psychology, one gets irritated at people who are the focus of one's own shadow projections – that is, we despise in others the qualities that we hate most, and are often therefore most unconscious of, in ourselves. So to become self-aware at moments of irritation is potentially to withdraw the projection from others; it is an opportunity to form a more rounded, realistic picture of oneself.

In spite of this (and other connections with depth psychology I have pointed out in this book), neither Fripp nor the school he has created in his image, Guitar Craft, puts much stock in

classical analytical theory or methods per se – symbolic dream analysis, the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and the rest of it – at least so far as I have been able to make out. Frank Sheldon, and the Alexander technique in general, are similarly disinclined to probe for deep symbolic meanings, repressed psychological traumas, and so on. When Sheldon noted that I carried my right shoulder lower than my left, and I said I believed that this was the result of a car accident suffered ten years ago, he seemed uninterested. And when he was working on my posture – which was a mess – and I asked him *why* I had been walking around in these contorted positions all my life, he said, "The Alexander technique doesn't look for deep causes. We deal with the body as it is now." I didn't have to look far, of course, to find a psychological explanation for going around with my nose in the air – it seemed an apt expression of one of my less attractive personality traits. But I could see his point. It had to do, so to speak, with working on the intangible by means of the tangible.

I don't remember what the Crafties had to say at dinner about what had irritated them on Wednesday. After the dinner and group discussion, jump-suited Phil, California Karen, Big Jim, novice Tim, and I went into Phil's room with our guitars and sat on beds and chairs to prepare our act for the following night's performance at the dreaded Iron Rail. My journal entry, written after midnight, reflects the tone of my experience with the group: "Not the joy of discovery on solo guitar, but revelations on an entirely different level: how people interact; what their personas say to each other; how just the exertion of a little *attention* by everybody would make things *ever* so much more efficient (less talking and more listening); how even when you think you hear everything going on, you feel powerless to affect the course of events – you don't know what to do; how much I wanted to share my musical ideas and inspiration with my partners, but ended up feeling guilty for having exerted my will too much over the group."

In short, aside from the element of working with the new tuning as a compositional exercise, the challenge turned out to be a crash course in group dynamics in a music-making situation under intense pressure of time. Our total inability to come to any reasonable, rational delegation of responsibilities within our group was painfully evident to me. We riffed and tuned out, we got working in one direction for five minutes and then it would all fall apart and we'd go off in another direction. At least half of our vitally valuable rehearsal time was spent chit-chatting about matters wholly removed from the task at hand, as our collective mind free-associated from this to that irrelevant subject.

I saw clearly how one solution would be for one person to take command, assuming the role of leader. But how to settle on a leader? We were incapable of even broaching the subject. And if one person was to lead, did that not fly in the face of the idea of a communally made, democratically organized music? Looking back now, it seems to me that our little group experienced the perennial organizational chaos of King Crimson in microcosm.

Somehow we stumbled and bungled our way toward three pieces. The first one began with lots of spacey improvised harmonics, until one or two jagged melodic riffs were introduced, leading into slightly decrepit four-part polyphony. The second one was a sort of slow acoustic ballad based on a simple chord progression borrowed from a song I'd written for my daughter when she used to dance around the home piano as a toddler: I melodramatically strummed the chords in the new tuning one by one, someone else played a bass line, there were also perhaps a melody and arpeggio work on top. It was called "Round and Round." Our third piece began with everyone stomping their feet and was a loud, boisterous, rhythmic, dissonant pot-boiler.

About halfway through our rehearsal, Robert's form appeared in the doorway. We were playing my precious little major-key ballad with the big chord strums. I looked up to see his lips tightly puckered together as if he'd just bitten into a lemon, eyes agog, eyebrows drawn down in

piqued mock horror and distaste. His whole expression said, “What – my splendid new tuning – all my careful teaching – being used ... for THIS?” I found his reaction hysterical. I didn’t care if he didn’t approve – Kate thought the song was beautiful, and I did too.

Robert, in fact, was flying all over the house that night, guitar strapped on, wings on his feet, floating from room to room, checking on each group’s progress, offering comments. He seemed happy, energetic, the mad master of the house. Penguin Joe later told me that Robert was seen around mid-evening poised in the middle of the grand stairway, ecstatically letting rip with a phenomenal improvisation.

By one o’clock in the morning, my fingers didn’t hurt any more. I think that after two days of pain ranging from annoying to excruciating they just sort of turned their nerve endings off.

Thursday

Private guitar lessons were held in the morning, but once again Fripp and I talked not about guitar but about my dissertation. It was now that he suggested I contact Eno’s management and write about him instead. Fripp said he had read my entire fifty-four-page “Prospectus,” an outlined plan/summary of the projected work, which I’d written up for my Berkeley advisors and had given him a copy of the previous day. “It’s good for what it does,” he said judiciously, giving me to infer that what it did wasn’t good enough. Then with heavy sarcasm he remarked, “I’m flattered you see fit to compare me with *Harry Partch*.”

(What I’d actually written was, “I will argue that Fripp’s place in history is not solely among the ranks of the progressive rockers, but in the company of a group of individualistic composers who pursued their unique, idiosyncratic vision of music essentially outside the major ‘serious’ and academic musical trends of their day and tended to espouse uncompromising, quasi-mystical views of the nature of music: Edgar Varese, Harry Partch, Charles Ives, John McLaughlin, Sun Ra, John Cage, and I.A. MacKenzie, to name a few.”)

Partch or no Partch, Fripp was against me carrying the project through. A dissertation on Fripp would be a “dead form.” He talked about his feeling that there are no bona fide apprenticeships in music today, certainly not within the academic world. That was why he started Guitar Craft. Whereas what I was proposing to write about was in effect the period of Fripp’s own apprenticeship – a subject about which, he argued, I could know absolutely nothing. Moreover, he said, his *real* task would begin only after another two to three years. Just what that task was I had no inkling, nor have I today.

I had a problem. I had been in graduate school at Berkeley for nearly four years, was lucky to have been given permission by my advisers to work on popular music at all; I was behind schedule, was virtually ready – or so I thought – to start writing, and had to get cracking. And here was Fripp calling it “dead work” and doing the best he could to stop the project. At the very best, I’d be writing without his co-operation; at the worst, I’d be violating the better judgement of the teacher who in two and a half days had already shown me more about music than had all my combined professors in some eight years of higher education in music.

I volunteered, “Actually, the prospect of one year of dead work doesn’t sound so bad to me at this point, and perhaps preferable to returning to the drawing board to start over from scratch with Eno.” Don’t despair about starting over, he advised. Nothing is ever wasted; no real work is ever wasted.

From this point on I had serious doubts and reservations about writing about Fripp, some of which linger to this day, even as I write this.

Fripp concluded our appointment by saying, “Let’s get together later to work on guitars.”

I had to clear my head, so I donned my running clothes and went out for a jog in the cold bracing air. I’d done the same thing Tuesday morning, when time hadn’t seemed quite so valuable. Now every minute seemed precious, but I needed a grounding in the earth: I needed the rush of blood in the veins, the pounding of the feet, the crunch of the snow, the beauty of the woods, fields, streams, snow, ice, trees, animals. Being in the snowy outdoors also unlocked, particularly in my sleep-deprived, dreaming-while-awake frame of mind, ancient childhood memories of winters in New York and New England. Since moving to California in 1977, I had effectively forgotten about ... all this. The feel of freezing air on the skin, the steam bellowing from the mouth and nostrils. I was meeting myself in those woods.

After this jog I seated myself in my room, turned the metronome on at a fast clip, and did a fierce, driving, pointillistic, ostinato improvisation on our fourths-and-fifths exercise, each note presenting itself out of nowhere. This was not “me” playing, but rather little decisions being presented to my judgement as my mind and body held a swirl of patterns in motion like a juggler. At some point Fripp shimmered in to give me some pointers. Observing my right-hand technique, he said, “Wretched – but not hopeless.”

After lunch, at two P.M. there was a discussion meeting in the library. As there were many such meetings throughout the week, I am unable to remember specifically what was said in which. But I remember the gist of much of the material. And I remember the apparent ease and confidence with which Fripp spoke to the group, never using prepared notes of any kind, sitting relaxed yet erect with one leg crossed over the other in his corner chair. There was a fluidity in his discourse – evidence of contact with such a vast range of ideas that simple guided association led him naturally from one to the other, as in an accomplished musical improvisation. He was an inspiring speaker with a lively and much-used sense of humor.

I contemplated Fripp the man and wrote in my journal: “Fripp’s person: part of his effect comes simply from being in his position. Of course, he has created, and continually creates that position.” I imagine that many Crafties – myself very much included – were, initially upon seeing and meeting Robert, victims a bit of the star-struck syndrome: here you find yourself face-to-face with this cultural symbol, this giant of a guitarist, this hero or anti-hero of contemporary musical mythology. Fripp himself might phrase this aura in terms of the iconic rock-star energy he had earned and was now able to draw on for his own purposes. But even after the initial star-struck sheen had worn off, I could not think of another human being I had met who possessed such presence. When he was in the room it was impossible to ignore him. When he spoke, people listened. When he led, people followed. How much of this was due to the position he was in, the role he had created for himself, and how much was in the person himself? It was impossible to make out. Eventually I concluded that even if Robert Fripp did not “naturally” possess the aura of the genuine teacher, he was a consummate actor, able to *act* the role of the teacher down to the last detail. Bob Gerber once put it this way: “Robert’s role is to represent the demand of music to you.”

And maybe, I sometimes speculated, I was fabricating all this “aura” business in my mind, projecting onto Robert the image of the timeless inner teacher within myself. Who at other times I have had reason to suspect is actually none other than Johann Sebastian Bach.

The mind games went round and round and never stopped.

The great teacher could also be maddening. During one of the group discussion meetings – it might well have been the one at two P.M. on Thursday afternoon – Fripp spoke of the origin of the new standard tuning, how it "flew by" his inner field of vision at a certain visual angle, in certain colors, as he was sweating one day in a sauna in New York in September 1983. He did not want to go public with it because he felt it would deprive future Guitar Craft students the opportunity to experience it for the first time in its proper context. He also felt that when guitarists experiment with different tunings they usually do so casually, haphazardly, and superficially, and that at least two months' solid work with the new standard tuning was necessary to appreciate what he modestly called its "infinite superiority" to other tunings.

Because the new tuning calls for the second string to be tuned a full fifth higher than in old standard tuning, and the first string a third higher, it was not uncommon for strings to break when Crafties tuned up. I found Fripp's explanation for this mundane operation of the laws of physics and metal stress exasperating and mystifying: he said the guitar whose strings snapped was not "ready" for the new tuning. He suggested that those guitarists whose strings were breaking should somehow mentally prepare themselves and their guitars to accept the new tuning, and that then the strings would hold. I objected heatedly: why didn't we just use lighter-gauge strings specifically engineered to be tuned at higher pitches, which would also result in considerably less string tension, especially on the unwound second string, which was so tight that it was a real bitch to play? Fripp responded testily, "I'm telling you, it's *not* the string gauges that are causing strings to snap," ending all discussion on the matter.

When I went home the following week I went to the music store, purchased a selection of gauges, and restrung my guitar intelligently for the new tuning, resulting in a marked improvement in tone and playability. Fripp has since reconsidered the matter and Guitar Craft Services now offers custom sets of rationally gauged strings (11 13 23 32 46 56 and 12 15 23 32 46 60).

As with the idea of uncontrolled experimentation with his new standard tuning, Fripp in 1986 seemed to take a dim view of an enterprising student who had taken it upon himself to work out a series of chord fingering diagrams in guitar tablature for the new tuning, and to distribute the resulting manual of harmonic possibilities amongst interested Crafties. (I actually heard this from another Crafty, and did not talk to Fripp about it myself.) There was thus, in the early years of Guitar Craft, a certain element of guardedness, bordering on secrecy, as regards types of basic technical knowledge that have traditionally been considered public domain. It made me a little uncomfortable. Not that Fripp ever demanded his students to swear in blood never to divulge such information. With the new tuning, he gently but firmly requested that we not share it with anyone who would not give it at least two months' solid consideration. (Fripp went public with the new tuning in an interview in Musician magazine published in February 1989.)

You could never figure Fripp out. One minute he would be talking about the new tuning flying by in a spontaneous unbidden vision, about previous Guitar Craft group exercises in visualization that sounded something like mass hallucinations or collective hypnosis, about entering his drummer's body and seeing out from behind his eyes; and the next minute he would be ridiculing fuzzy-headed musical-spiritual experiences, viciously lampooning musicians whom he'd seen playing "'Really with the spirit, man,' while putting out the most unbelievably awful cliches."

Fripp would often discourse on big words, giving them all precise definitions. One such series of words had to do with the sensation of being aware, the topic having been brought up by a student's imprecise use of the word "consciousness" in a question. I may be over-systematizing this in my recollection, but the pith seemed to be a concept of a graded series: irritability,

sensitivity, and consciousness – and beyond consciousness, that ineffable realm Gurdjieff called *soleil absolu*, literally "absolute sun."

Irritability is a fundamental quality of all living things, and some scientists have even spoken of irritability as part of the definition of biological life itself. Irritability is the capacity to respond to stimuli from the outside; even the smallest micro-organisms display "irritation" in their automatic responses to external conditions. At the human level, irritation can indeed be nearly synonymous with annoyance and its negative connotations; but in a larger view, human irritability carries the capacity to reflect the irritated person's disturbance back on himself, thereby representing an increase in awareness. Irritability in the Guitar Craft scheme of things is a precious quality, a tool for work on oneself.

Sensitivity, in Fripp's definition, is what most people call consciousness. That human sense of being aware, alive, attentive to oneself, and not merely irritable in the automatic, biological sense. The word "sensitivity" also happily carries with it a social meaning, as in sensitive to other people. Sensitivity can even take on a global meaning when one considers sensitivity to life processes on earth as a whole – processes of which one's own limited awareness is but a small part.

Consciousness Fripp spoke of in respectful, majestic tones, as the hard-won achievement of only a very few people who worked for it diligently and strenuously over a period of many years.

And as for *soleil absolu*, Fripp said almost nothing, quite possibly because of it nothing can be said.

Fripp used two words related to this whole series, "attention" and "awareness," Fripp used with more or less their everyday meanings, in various functional contexts: "Concentrate your attention on your left hand and feel what it is like to be aware of the pulse in your fingers."

Fripp's lectures could go off on the loftiest speculative, philosophical, and psychological flights, but he was not advocating experience of altered states of consciousness for its own sake. He loved to make fun of Zaven, the spiritually-minded young man who was just a bit too eager to share with the group his own experiments in meditation and other disciplines. Through my eyes and projections, Zaven was simply an obnoxious holier-than-thou braggart of the worst sort. Once in the library Zaven was telling the assembled group how at one time in his life he had meditated for hours every day for weeks and months on end, and had gotten so that he was in a more or less permanent blissfully detached frame of mind, which he fancied might be the *samadhi* of Hindu and Buddhist mystics. At length Zaven asked the patiently listening Fripp, "What do you think? What is this *samadhi* all about?" Fripp paused for a couple of beats, smiled condescendingly, said, "It's ... *nice*," and returned to his own agenda.

At the two o'clock meeting on Thursday afternoon, Fripp also talked about rhythmic exercises as a means of practicing the division of attention. He is fond of doing a certain musician's party trick for magazine interviewers, and tried it out on us: moving one hand to a beat of four and the other to a beat of five while continuing to talk, explaining that if we could keep part of the mind on the beat of four and another part on the beat of five we may find we have achieved something of significance. Watching his hands bob up and down and listening to his words flowing out in clear, natural cadences is enough to impress most people. He finished by saying, "You might try to find some way of doing this ... But you needn't talk at the same time ... That's only for if you're a smart-ass." He was a smart-ass, that's for sure – but such a loveable smart-ass.

The meeting was concluded with an announcement of the schedule of our departure for the Iron Rail gig that evening.

That afternoon each of the performance groups met with Frank Sheldon, who showed us how we could apply what we had learned in terms of posture and relaxation to our group rehearsals. Essentially the procedure involved taking a few minutes to slow down, still the mind, relax the body, feel the awareness in the hands – all this done as a group, seated on chairs in a little circle. Frank talked us through it, and we played my precious ballad, "Round and Round." It sounded, for the first time, how it was supposed to sound: magical, pure, crystalline – a few minutes of utterly transcendent beauty. Enthusiasm was high: everyone in the group *heard* it better. Why? Because Sheldon had relaxed us enough to *listen*.

At three-forty-five Robert found me in my room and told me to get ready for a private guitar lesson. "I'm ready," I said. "A bald statement," quoth he. In his studio, after an analysis of my right-hand technique, I asked him how all of this impeccable technique related to the slashing chordal guitar solo on "Sailor's Tale." He said that solo was inspired, laid down in the studio at three or four in the morning during days that began at eight A.M. and included writing out string parts for "Prelude – Song of the Gulls" and other such duties. He said that when one really plays, one forgets all the technique. Yet we study the technique in order to get to that point where we can forget it. He said to get to that point takes about fourteen years. Meanwhile, the more we study technique, the more access we have to actual Music. I said yes, this seems to happen with increasing frequency. He agreed. As for thrashing guitar solos, he said he had had to develop plenty of musculature and stamina.

During this lesson Robert also spoke of the perils of trying to develop too fast, as cases of burnout in ASCE ten-month residential programs at Claymont prove. My attention was wavering. Was he trying to warn me about something? He also said that pure anger could set one back three years, and that he knew about this from personal experience. Later when I got to thinking about this, I would contemplate Fripp's immaculately performed, completely convincing actor-like presence and wonder where his real emotions were. It disturbed me a bit. All these numbers – fourteen years, ten months, four against five, seven years for this exercise, two years for that. Uncontrolled expression of anger setting one back three years sounded like a nice formula, but it also sounded like a recipe for emotional repression that could have truly disastrous consequences in the long run.

But most of what he said about the development of technique made sense. I had experienced the process of "inspired" improvisation for many years, but hadn't had the vaguest idea what it consisted of, much less how to teach it. I was starting to get an inkling of how it could be taught, and it boiled down to emphasizing the physical aspects of playing – relaxation, posture, hand position, and so on – along with the mental aspects of concentration, attention, and awareness. From this point of view, ideas about music theory – which were how I had tended to approach the teaching of improvisation – were quite secondary.

Our group, which we had dubbed My Five Sons, had a dress rehearsal at about five-thirty. It went O.K., but for me the music had none of the scintillating presence it had had with Frank Sheldon earlier in the afternoon. The source was undeniably *there*, but tapping into it was no easy matter. During the rehearsal Phil told us of a bizarre dream he'd had: we Crafties were all a bunch of incompetent midget plumbers running around trying to fix a pipe that had broken here in this house and was gushing water all over the place. In the dream he saw this spectacle and laughed and laughed. The telling of this dream affected me strangely. It seemed a preternatural manifestation of the state of our collective psyche.

At dinner Fripp clinked his glass and said with a smirk, “Although I am now a teacher of Guitar Craft, as you may know for many years I was a professional musician and worked in a number of bands – among others, one known as King Crimson. If anyone has any stupid, irrelevant, pointless, idiotic questions they may wish to ask, please feel free to do so now.” After this introduction it may seem a miracle that anyone said anything at all, but, idiots as we all knew ourselves to be by this point, asking Robert a question about his life as a rock star seemed only a minor embarrassment in the face of the prevailing humiliation. The brave souls who asked the first few questions were faced with scorn that was, all in all, par for the course. I forget what the exact questions were, but it really doesn’t matter. The exchange went something like this:

“Would you care to comment on how you re-formed King Crimson in the 1980s?”

“No. Next question.” Laughter from the head table.

“Would you mind commenting on how you composed ‘Larks’ Tongues in Aspic’?”

“Yes, I would.” Snickers from the assemblage.

It gradually dawned on people that even this was a mini-challenge: you had to phrase the question exactly right, so that it really was a question. Fripp had an aphorism for this: “The quality of the question determines the quality of the answer.” Which I have never been able to reconcile with his quoting of Gurdjieff: “Speak roughly, it is only necessary to indicate the sense.” Later Fripp would tell me that both aphorisms say the same thing. But tonight precise, academic, pedantic speech-forms were in order.

Eventually things got going, and in spite of the often fascinating tidbits of information thrown out by Robert about his career, the overall impression was that it was indeed all irrelevant, pointless, and idiotic – that it belonged to a different order, a different world, than the one in which we found ourselves currently engaged. But for the rock fan in all of us, it was fun – a little diversion.

Ever the unwilling idiotic musicologist, I volunteered an ever-so-carefully-phrased question myself: “What kinds of music do you like to listen to, and what sorts of music have been a big influence on you in the past?” Fripp responded courteously that he listened to many kinds of music, with a decided preference for live music over records. Among recorded artifacts, among his favorites were Elvis Presley’s Sun sessions (“excellent stuff”), Bartok’s String Quartets (“at one time, very important in my life”), the Beatles (“although I don’t listen to them much any more”), the Renaissance polyphony of English composer Orlando Gibbons, Balinese gamelan music, and Bulgarian women’s music (“incredible”).

It may have been at this dinner – though possibly the night before – that Fripp delivered a short remonstrative homily to the effect that Guitar Craft XII had not yet developed a “group mind.” It may have been immediately after this that Dick the firecracker chimed his glass, got up, and made an impassioned, agitated speech. He had an Americanized British accent, with emotion causing his voice to break at irregular intervals.

“Here we are,” he said. “In less than an hour we’re gonna be setting out to play a gig representing Guitar Craft. And we don’t know what the hell we’re doing. We don’t know where we’re going, but more important, we don’t know how we’re gonna present ourselves. We haven’t even discussed things like what cars we’re gonna ride in, where the guitars are gonna go. Robert talks about a group mind. We don’t have the slightest awareness of who we are, what we mean, how we’re gonna do this thing. What are the names of all the acts? What order are we gonna play in? How long are we gonna play for? Who’s gonna tell the management what we’re doing? We have no group mind. And I’m telling you, we’d better get our shit together right now or it’s

gonna be pretty bad. What we need is a stage manager, and I'm calling on someone right now to step out and be our stage manager, to get this thing set up right so that we can do it."

He sat down, fuming.

Robert sat through Dick's speech wearing that inscrutable grinning grimace of his, made no reply, and I had a sneaking suspicion that he was preparing a colossal embarrassment for us all on account of all the things that Dick was talking about. I was having visions of twenty-six disorganized guitarists arriving at some honky-tonk redneck bar with no clue as to what was going on, no leadership, no way to set things up with the joint's surly manager. After the experience of rehearsing with my group, an experience largely of directionlessness and ineffectual flopping around with no one willing to step forward and take charge, I couldn't bear the thought of standing along the sidelines witnessing the sheer chaos of impatient beer-guzzling country music fans watching a bunch of long-haired acoustic guitarists milling around and then presenting an ill-planned succession of nervously executed, jive, intellectual-shit-music acts. I feared for my personal safety.

Tormented by these premonitions of disaster, and feeling very important and decisive, shortly after Dick finished his speech I stood up and said, with all due butterflies in my stomach, "I'd like to volunteer to be stage manager, and immediately after dinner I'd like to talk with a representative leader of each group to discuss the plan." Fripp said nothing.

We met, I made a little list of the acts (which I have since lost), and soon everyone was piling into cars and vans. We drove through the dark and the cold to the Iron Rail.

Having found the place, we parked the car and I scampered out and ran to the door, wanting to be the first one to get there in order to nip confusion in the bud. It turned out the Iron Rail was a small, classy cocktail lounge in a dignified old colonial-style building in downtown Charles Town, possibly adjoining a respectable inn or bed-and-breakfast-type place. The bartender wore a stiff white shirt with a black bow tie, and the place was almost empty. The only people sitting at tables looked to be upper-middle-class tourists quietly sipping mixed drinks.

I found the manager and told him Guitar Craft had arrived. He obviously knew we were coming, and didn't seem very interested in my agitation. He told us we could put the guitars in the middle room, and that we'd play in the back room. He disappeared. The Iron Rail looked to be a converted residential house, with handsome woodwork and old-fashioned wallpaper. There was the front room with the bar, a small middle room with a few small tables, and an only slightly larger back room, with five or six slightly larger tables, elegantly set with white linen tablecloths, silverware, and roses in slender glass vases. There were no people in the back room, nor was there a stage of any kind. In fact, the main organizational duty of the stage manager turned out to be clearing away a space to accomodate the Crafty performing groups.

The twenty-six Crafties filtered in, got unbundled from their winter clothing, stashed their guitars in the middle room, milled about, ordered beer or soft drinks. Soon the place was packed – but it was clear we were to be our own audience. I ordered a 7-Up, which, served in a glass with ice, a twist, and a plastic drink mixer set me back about two dollars. I repaired to the back room, where I sat at the corner table on the left and contemplated bitter fate.

Soon Robert arrived with an entourage of several women – a couple of the ghostly kitchen workers, now all elegantly dolled up, plus the beautiful Nina, Matt's girlfriend. They were all smiles and joviality, and settled into the corner table on the right, on the opposite side of the door from me. Frank Sheldon, posture statue-perfect as always, took his place among them. With a flourish, Robert ordered champagne for the table, and when, to the delight of his ladies, he

procured a broomstick handle from somewhere and began banging it on the floor and ceiling, evidently practicing the form of music criticism he would soon be dishing out, I began to garner the distinct impression that *that* table, at any rate, was planning to have a good time tonight, probably at the Crafties' expense.

I don't remember exactly how we got started. As stage manager I probably should have introduced each act – but there seemed little point, and instead I just let things happen in the order we had planned.

The music. I had heard only fragments of each group's set as I had wandered around the house over the past day and a half, and was quite unprepared for the splendor of the concert that unfolded. Each group had a distinct personality, and some pieces were rather more accomplished and polished than others. But as a whole it was quite overwhelming – set after set of mini-acoustic-rock gamelan – now fast, pointillistic, polyrhythmic, and stimulating; now gentle, lyrical, poignant, and heartbreaking. Some of it was old-fashioned tonal, some was modal, some was based on unusual empirical scales, some was more rhythmically than tonally based. What impressed me most was that we had made this – created a whole mini-repertoire of interesting, difficult, varied, convincing music – in a day and a half of work, following another day and a half's preparatory exercises with the new tuning. From this point of view, it was just stunning, and I shuddered at the awesome energy, efficiency, and vitality of the organism – Guitar Craft – that had made it possible.

Without a doubt the best performance was turned in by Matt and Tony, who walked in the door playing, guitars strapped on, smiling, weaving their way through the crowded room. Never glancing at their fingers, they engaged the assembled Crafties with playfully meaningful looks, bopping through one of the most convolutedly logical, lurchingly lively Bartok-meets-Chuck-Berry compositions I have ever heard – until, finishing up, they glided back out the door again to the thunderous applause of the audience. Later I gushed to Matt, "Your piece was fantastic, beautiful, incredible ... It was – art!" He shrugged off the compliments with a good-natured "Naaah."

The criticism. As the Crafties performed, Robert took it upon himself to "galvanize our attention" with hoots, whistles, shouts of "Heavy metal rules!," banging of the broomstick, and in general making as big a pain in the ass of himself as possible. He reserved his worst abuse for my group's precious ballad, "Round and Round." Every time I strummed a big six-note chord – and there were a lot of them, in perfectly predictable places – Robert would let loose with a sound resembling a sick cow in orgasm. This, along with gleeful titters from his entourage, the broomstick, and other unspeakable verbal ejaculations from Robert, made it quite impossible to hear the piece. Somehow, though, I had seen it coming and didn't get too flustered; the ego dimly wished for the piece to be heard in the spirit of its making, but the attention was certainly galvanized to the present situation. After "Round and Round," we did our foot-stomping piece (ecstatic, abandoned cries of "Rock and roll! Rock and roll!" from the head table), finished, and took our seats.

The performances of all the groups took less time than expected, and after a short break it was decided to do them all again. By this time a few curious customers were peering in the door, and occasionally staying to hear a set or two. A very, very drunk blonde woman in her thirties literally staggered in with a friend and loudly offered her opinions on the proceedings. Robert's banter with this sozzled specimen, egging her on to be as rude and disruptive to the musicians as possible, was priceless, but unfortunately I cannot remember any of the exact words. (He later moralized to the Crafties, "We were *very* fortunate to have the drunk blonde.")

Toward the end of the evening Bob Gerber, who was a rank beginner, having played guitar for all of four days, gave a touching, endearing solo performance. He cradled his guitar like a big loving teddy bear and plunked out his notes with sensitivity and conviction. Gerber's playing was a living reminder that technique isn't everything – that music can speak through a person at any level of expertise.

Back at the Claymont mansion, at twelve-forty-five, I wrote in my journal that I was feeling a let-down after three days of unremitting intensity. It was still hard to unwind, but, for better or for worse, I was feeling more my normal self again. I reflected "how in the Iron Rail Gurdjieffian situation, *everyone* could and did learn something individual and profound at their own level." I speculated that "Fripp has perhaps made a successful conversion of his chief negative feature – being an egotistical smart-ass – into his chief asset."

Friday

Fripp's stream of aphorisms continued unabated. At breakfast on Friday a Crafty made a public confession of his temptation to have too much to drink the night before at the Iron Rail, and explained how he had handled it. "Temptation is a reward," Fripp pontifically intoned. "The devil cannot make use of people who are drowsy ... Until now, you were just a turkey."

In the two days that followed, guided by Robert, we worked on integrating the various musical patterns, exercises, rhythms, and ostinati we had learned into a number of large-scale pieces for the complete ensemble of guitarists.

I wrote in my journal, "What are Fripp's GC exercises? They are aural/physical mandalas for individual or collective (they all work together) use." I was impressed by a sense that everything we had learned was fitting together like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. I had a vision of an immense sphere composed of thousands, millions of inner oscillations of many different frequencies and rhythms: composing music was not a matter of starting from scratch and piling notes, lines, chords on top of each other, but rather was a matter of eliminating all but an infinitesimal fraction of the oscillations in the great sphere, which harmonized with each other automatically, and the fewer lines – the more transparent the music – the better.

Friday morning after the group guitar lesson I walked over to inspect the Claymont community bookstore. It was closed. I sat on a rock near the farm houses and barns, watching young boys play war games. On the way back a turkey of the genuine biological variety gobbled at me.

During the afternoon group guitar lesson Robert had us start work on odd meters in earnest. Difficult counting games, counting out loud or silently. To play in a meter of 5/8, for instance, he recommended feeling a steady quarter-note beat underneath. A typical pattern involved playing big slashing chords on eighth notes one and three, counting eighth notes, and tapping the foot to the quarter note:

```
Count: ||: 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 :||
Slash: ||: !   !     | !   !     :||
Tap:   ||: x   x   x     x   x   :||
```

This is the rhythmic basis of many passages in King Crimson and Fripp's solo work; once practiced and grasped it become quite natural and automatic, but as most of the students, myself included, had had little if any experience in quintuple meters, it took some getting used to. The basic pattern of septuple meters is similar.

Then what you do, or what Fripp had us do, was to get one group of guitarists playing in five and another group playing in seven, so that it will take thirty-five beats to run through one complete cycle. With one group slashing in five and the other thrashing in seven, the combined slashing and thrashing is most disorienting, and took us the remainder of our time at Claymont to work out – even by the end, as a group we didn't quite have it:

```
||: 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5 :||
||: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 :||
||: !   !     !   !     !   !     !   !     !   !     !   !     !   !     :||
||: !   !   !     !   !   !     !   !   !     !   !   !     !   !   !     :||
```

Then Fripp would give to a third group of guitarists who had distinguished themselves for their rhythmic aptitude a hairy ostinato figure or some lacerating melodic riffs to play over or under the slashing and thrashing. He would set everything in motion, part by part, group by group, walk around the room, adjust it – and then leave. We would hack away for a few minutes, lose it, start it up again, lose it. Such exercises took enormous concentration.

When it worked, it was an incredible sound. It sounded like a giant lurching soul-train locomotive with five seven-sided wheels on one side and seven five-sided wheels on the other, running at ninety miles an hour and hauling hundreds of empty tin cans strung along behind.

I remember one afternoon session in the ballroom when we were all bombing down the track, the asymmetrical soul train in full rampaging flight, and the strangest sense of silence and confidence came over me – I guess this was one of the first moments it clicked for me, when it went beyond arduous labor and unnatural-feeling counting and became, however briefly, utterly intuitive and effortless, as easy as breathing in and out. I couldn't help but break into a big grin as I kept slashing away. Looking up and around the room, whose eyes should I see fixed on me but Tony Geballe's – he was wearing the exact same smile that a couple of days earlier I had found irritating in the extreme. Now it seemed that I suddenly understood what it was all about, and I smiled at Tony and he smiled back at me and for a brief minute or two we were locked in complete sympathetic resonance, leading the ensemble in an ineffable musical *coniunctio*.

Then it all fell apart, and I had to work at it and count it out all over again.

During my Friday afternoon guitar lesson with Fripp, I pushed the dissertation idea for the last time. He didn't budge. He said music – which I proposed concentrating on in my thesis – had always been only a small part of his work, all the *Musician* editing and writing, the Frippertronics tour, everything, how could anybody but himself write a book on him, he asked. I said perhaps it depended on the *kind* of book. He said music was easy for him, always there; the rest, all the other stuff, had been hard, and in a way much more significant.

After dinner the ensemble of twenty-six Crafty guitarists was given an unscheduled, surprise lesson by Robert at eight o'clock. The emphasis was on exercises in five and seven. We were clearly working toward something.

There followed a meeting discussion in the library at nine, during which Fripp magnetized me, discoursing on creativity, sensitivity, consciousness, visualization, the screen of the mind's field of vision, Walter J. Ong's theory of the evolution of the aural-visual split in Western society, and other topics. I remember some details of this most mighty of Frippian lectures. He talked about how musicians tend to hear only the note they are playing at any given instant, but how with practice one can train one's field of hearing – in a certain visual way – to include a measure, a phrase, a section, an entire piece, even a whole concert's performance of music, so

that even though one is still only playing one note at a time, one's awareness is nevertheless also focussed on that note's place and function in a much larger hierarchy of frames of reference – by implication extending out to one's life itself, and beyond.

Fripp talked about visualizing meters, devoting special attention to meters based on seven, explaining how one can train oneself to almost literally *see* the pattern of seven beats as it goes through recurring cycles against the backdrop of the mental field of vision. This led to a consideration of sacred geometry and architecture, Fripp expounding on the symbolism of the number seven as interpreted through Gurdjieff's "Law of Seven" or Heptaparaparshinokh, and as glimpsed by Fripp in a cathedral in Belgium.

Once or twice I had the impression that Fripp's ordinarily crystal-clear logic and powers of exposition were lapsing into nonsensical gobbledegook. However at such moments it seemed that this was through no fault of his own, but rather because language itself was being strained past the breaking point – ideas arising, flowing, criss-crossing each other in a way that mere prose simply could not duplicate. It has also occurred to me that perhaps I could have made more sense of the more impenetrable passages had I had further preparation to receive what was being imparted.

I also had the peculiar, uneasy, yet exhilarating feeling that Fripp was speaking directly and personally to *me* almost throughout his lecture. Perhaps others felt something similar – this was apparently a fairly common experience among Gurdjieff's followers. Fripp looked into my eyes a lot as he spoke. Once, as my back was getting stiff from sitting cross-legged on the floor, I leaned back on my elbows and stretched out my legs on the floor in front of me; staring directly at me, Fripp immediately started talking about how our body position affects our whole frame of mind, how if we adopt a posture of reclining laziness, our minds will surely quickly tune out. Staring back at him, I continued to recline defiantly for a few minutes, but it was no use; soon, feeling gently chastised, I sat up again.

In some strange way, Fripp revealed himself – or revealed something – in this lecture. And if it sounds lame to say that there was a knowledge and knowing in the library that evening that is impossible to convey through the printed page, so be it. I do know that a few others besides myself tasted it, felt it, sensed it, perceived it – a certain quality. For when Fripp was finished and left the room, followed by most of the Crafties, Tony Geballe, Ray Jung, heavy metal Rod, and I remained sitting on the floor, in effect stunned into speechlessness. We just sat in silence for several minutes. There was nothing to say.

At length, as the relishing of that certain quality died away of itself, I got up, ran down to the basement and scanned the rec room – civilized beer being served up by the ghostly attendant – decided against partaking, ran upstairs, grabbed my guitar, ran into the dark deserted dining hall, and let rip with a loco improvisation. Then I started practicing one of the thrashing/counting exercises in five and seven, the sound reverberating off the bare wooden floor and walls. Firecracker Dick soon drifted in with his guitar and we each took a different part in the exercise. One by one, about five or six more guitarists came in, and we carried on, getting it right, losing the count, trying again, switching parts. The thrashing piece was the loudest of all the exercises, and before long the dining hall was booming with a joyful noise. Penguin Joe later told me that it could be heard all over the house, and that he had chanced to pass Fripp's doorway on the second floor just as the locomotive in the dining hall was revving up. The door had opened slightly and a single eye – for some reason I was reminded of the victim's vulture eye in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" – had appeared in the crack.

I went to bed late that night. Every night at Claymont, sleep came hard – it was difficult to wind down.

Saturday

In the morning I did make it over to the Claymont bookstore while it was open, and marveled at the shelves stocked with all manner of devotional, practical, mystical, psychological, and philosophical literature by all manner of authors from parts West and East. There were tapes of Gurdjieff music, tapes of Bennett lectures, Bibles, Bhagavad-Gitas, tomes by everyone from Meister Eckhart to Sri Aurobindo. Out of this bountiful cornucopia of enlightenment I selected Bennett's cassettes entitled "Sex I," "Sex II," and "Sex III," or, as I remarked to the cash register clerk, trying to cover up my slight sense of embarrassment, "Sex, sex, and more sex."

In the afternoon Fripp had a percussionist – whose name I cannot remember – come in and teach us the principle of beating four against five – four steady beats in one hand against five in the other. The underlying principle of common-denominator subdivision could be applied to many other meters, such as the fairly commonplace two against three and three against four, as well as more exotic species such as four against seven and three against five. By the end of the session we were starting to get an inkling of how to pull off such exercises in the division of attention. By the end of the plane ride home to the West Coast the following day I had four against five and four against seven down pat in terms of simply hitting all the beats in both hands at the mathematically correct instants; in terms of actually *feeling* both metrical cycles simultaneously – true division of attention – four years later I am still working on it. Of exercises in the division of attention through musical counting of one kind or another, Fripp would say, "This exercise has changed lives."

Later Saturday afternoon Fripp called together the Crafties and told us to practice the four pieces which by now had coalesced from the many exercises – "Guitar Craft Theme I," "Guitar Craft Theme II," "Thrang Thrang Perboral Gozinbulx," and "Thrash." We split into groups before dinner to do so. After dinner there would be a final concert, the assembled Crafties playing with Fripp all together for our own edification and enjoyment.

Firecracker Dick, Penguin Joe, California Karen, another guitarist, and I were in my room thrashing when jump-suited Phil flew in with the startling news that a toilet had overflowed on the second floor – water was everywhere, and was leaking profusely through the ballroom ceiling. I ran down to the kitchen to collect mops and buckets, and into the ballroom where we did our best to clean up the mess. This mishap – perhaps just a coincidental accident due to ancient plumbing – bore for me the weight of tragedy, and had an unusual effect on my already overwrought psyche.

For toward the end of the ensuing dinner, unable to quiet my raging thoughts, intently staring into space in front of me, overcome with a feeling of profundity and prophecy, I tinkled my glass and, shaking, got up to deliver a speech. "Robert has talked," I said, "about our failure to develop a group mind during this seminar, and I wanted to add a couple of things to that. In rehearsing with my group for the Iron Rail performance, and in the other groups I've been in here, one thing has been clear, and that is our complete inability to work efficiently together, to get and stay organized, to formulate and work through a plan – to listen to each other and communicate with each other democratically and effectively. Nobody listens, time is wasted, nothing gets done.

"Whereas," I continued severely, "has anyone noticed that whenever we're sitting around the circle in the ballroom and Robert walks in, we are instantly completely attentive, silent, and

ready to work? This may be how the whole seminar is set up, and how we've been able to accomplish so much in so little time – by relying on the presence and charisma of a single leader. But my feeling is that in the long run, *that's a very dangerous way of getting things done*."

"A couple of days ago Phil had a dream that I'd like to share with you. He dreamed that all of us Crafties were a bunch of incompetent midget plumbers rushing around trying ineffectually to deal with the gushing flow of water from a broken pipe. It seems to me that the dream sums up our situation perfectly – here we are, being given a glimpse of an unending flow of creativity, of music, and we are utterly incapable of taking the steps needed to harness it. *And now it has happened in reality* – before dinner the toilet overflowed upstairs and flooded the ballroom through the ceiling."

The connection seemed obvious to me, but among the Crafties were some who weren't quite ready to buy into my little self-possessed feat of dream interpretation. "But – but it was so *funny*," stammered Phil himself, protesting that the overriding feeling-tone of the dream was one of boundless hilarity. Matt, taking a dim view of my speech, said, "Look, dreams come from individual people, and refer only to that individual. What could Phil's dream have to do with all of us?"

I was starting to respond that if there were such a thing as a group mind, then surely there is also such a thing as a collective unconscious, particularly in a group such as ours which had gone through this amazing week together, experiencing things collectively at all kinds of levels. But before I could get the words out, Fripp, who had evidently been observing the debate with bemusement, spoke with the ironic air and timing of the true comic: "That is the first time," he said slowly, grinning with infinite self-satisfaction, "that my musical creativity has been compared to an overflowing toilet."

Uproarious hoots of laughter from the assemblage. Fripp followed up by milking the metaphor for more than it was worth, each extension more absurd and each one eliciting more mirth than the last, "My cup runneth over" ... "My bowels are poured out for thee," and so on and so on. At some point in the general cathartic uproar I sat down, laughing self-consciously. I saw that once again Fripp had decided to use humor to defuse a hairy situation: a contentious discussion on the niceties of Jungian psychology was not what we needed at that point, and the teacher took action.

For myself, the dream, the plumbing accident, their timing, and my response to the apparent synchronicity never lost their significance, though I would be hard pressed to define that significance precisely. My speech, though I experienced it as heartfelt and prophetic in the heat of the moment, may have been sheer and utter idiocy on my part, mind-gaming, irrelevant self-indulgence. But the dream of the midget plumbers still seemed the culminating symbol of the entire week, the course's final emblem and image, a symbolic message from GC XII's group mind, collective unconscious, whatever you want to call it. It remains a tantalizing perplexity, a twisted circus mirror, an exclamation point followed by a question mark, a garishly colored comic-book tableau thrown up on the screen of my – our – awareness.

And maybe it doesn't make a damn bit of difference.

The final concert. After last-minute rehearsals amongst small groups, we all assembled in the ballroom. I wanted to be close to Fripp, and sat immediately to his left. Bob Gerber was on his right, and the circle of Crafties stretched all around the room. When all was quiet, Fripp – without a word – began the music with ethereal improvised harmonics, and we all followed suit. After a time, Fripp struck the initial notes of "Guitar Craft Theme I," and waves of gratitude washed through me – the harmonics followed by the slow, mournful progression were identical in

concept with “Round and Round,” my little ballad Fripp had jeered and ridiculed at the Iron Rail two nights before.

We all joined in with our parts to the “Theme,” and went around the circle clockwise according to a pre-arranged format in which each group of four or five guitarists had a sort of highlighted section. This accomplished, with the underlying structure of the “Theme” still going on, Fripp leaned toward Gerber, inviting him to take a solo. After Gerber played, Robert turned to me with an extraordinarily expectant, pregnant expression on his face. It was so unexpected and present as to be almost alarming, and involuntarily I turned away. Glancing back at him to find the same expression of gentle insistence, I gathered myself, left the ostinato, and tore a few slow aching strains out of my soul. Still a novice in the new tuning, I muffed a note here and there, but I can tell you my heart was in what I played.

Fripp looked at student after student, going clockwise around the circle, and each one responded, in his or her own style, with a few musical phrases, to the soft accompaniment of the “Theme.” After going a little more than halfway around the circle, he brought the piece to a close. (One Crafty – I think it was Arnie – later told the group how he had been planning and thinking, so eager to play his solo, only to be disappointed when the music was ended before he got the chance. Fripp laughed and said, “Life is like that.”)

Again silence, and it was up to me, by pre-arrangement, to count off the first of the thrashing pieces. I did my best to collect my wits and set a reasonable tempo, and counted, “1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5”, but from the very start we botched it – the intricate rhythms and cross-rhythms weren’t quite there; some players were holding together but others, including myself, were soon completely lost and coming in on random beats. After a few minutes of this pathetically limping locomotive, Robert stopped playing and looked at the floor, laying it to rest. We all stopped.

The second thrasher went somewhat better, but in my recollection a few of our rehearsals of the piece over the past day or two – supervised or spontaneously erupting – had been far superior. I suppose life is like that too.

More silence and centering, and then Robert struck up “Guitar Craft Theme II,” to which we all had pre-determined picking patterns. What was not pre-determined, or at least not known to us, was that Robert would rise from his chair, and slowly, deliberately, beginning with me, play each of us a little musical benediction on his gleaming black Ovation. He stood square in my sights, and, looking straight at me, played a phrase or two that in some incomprehensible way seemed to be his parting message, his summing-up of the musical relationship that had grown between us. He paused, looked away, moved to the player to my left, and did the same for him, offering subtly different thoughts, different phrases, different bodily gestures and facial expressions. And so on around the circle. Some of Fripp’s wordless words seemed comical, some serious, some light-hearted, some grave.

This – whatever it was – blessing, advice, commentary, soul communication, adieu – was patiently carried out for each student, and took quite some time. Finally Fripp returned to his chair and brought the concert to a close.

We gathered shortly thereafter for the final meeting in the library, which I remember largely for our discussion of the concert, as well as for a whole series of awful Frippian New Jersey jokes which had us all rolling around on the floor laughing with tears in our eyes. Then Guitar Craft XII was declared completed.

A bit later – probably around ten-thirty – I wandered down to the rec room, where Fripp was comfortably ensconced in a padded wicker chair, quaffing a brew, chatting with students,

and looking very much like your everyday normal guy. I talked with a few Crafties, but still found myself reluctant to imbibe – my edge was just too strong, and I wanted to drink *that* sensation to the dregs. So, hauling myself up to the ballroom, I ran into Dick and Karen, and we played "Round and Round" in all its feeble glory, followed by what was probably a rare, quite possibly unique, rendition of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" in Fripp's new standard tuning. Karen filtered out, mountain Annie filtered in, and Dick, who was even more wound up than I was, began a series of insane, electrically charged, volatile, superbly creative improvisational romps, which Annie and I struggled valiantly to keep up with. (It was Annie who said of Dick that night, "You're a firecracker tonight, boy!")

It was a final lesson in music-making. Annie was quite overwhelmed and lost, though she stuck through it, seeming to want to be there; I fell into the role of trying to be the conducting rod or middle ground between the two of them, and generally failed miserably, though there were a few wonderful moments of an alchemical blending of three very, very disjunct elements. I ended up being slightly annoyed at Dick, bless his creative soul, because he just refused to slow down and listen to us – he was in another world, in the grip of a spirit or demon. But I found it hard just to come out and say what was on my mind.

At about half-past-twelve we went into the gloomy dining room for a cup of herbal tea. Dick was hot to play on into the night, but I was finally verging on exhaustion. I said, "I have to take the leap of faith that music will still be available tomorrow, so I'm going to give my body a break." I went up to my room and lay in bed in the enveloping darkness, staring at the thick dusty curtains and thinking by free roller-coaster association for at least half an hour before I fell asleep.

Sunday

Bright and early there was a small group relaxation exercise in the library. The course was over, and some Crafties had already left. At breakfast, Fripp abandoned his post, or should I say throne, at the head table and came over and sat down to my left, mingling with the commoners. Karen told some hilarious story about being attacked naked by bees in central California, Fripp told more abominable New Jersey jokes. He talked a bit about Toyah Wilcox, his wife-soon-to-be, and I asked if we could soon expect to see little itty-bitty Fripps toddling about. "No," he drawled out slowly in best Dorset accent. "Read – my – lips ... NO."

I went out for a quick jog in the crunchy snow. In the shower afterwards I broke down and wept the most cleansing weep I had wept in a good ten years.

Phil, Ray Jung, and I packed Phil's car for the drive to the train station at Harper's Ferry. Robert was nowhere to be seen, and I had the idea to collect a few people and run up to his room to say goodbye. Robert, ever light on his feet, was running down the stairs just as we were running up. "I just wanted to say goodbye," I blurted out.

Fripp said, "It's all a hoax."

Postscript

I stayed with the new guitar tuning for about three months, and continued sporadically with some of the exercises. I was ultimately frustrated because, being primarily a rhythm-type player, after considerable effort and search I just could not find a good set of chords whose sound I liked. I saw that it would take many months – indeed years – to become adept at the new tuning, and that working with it would of necessity change my style of guitar playing. And I liked my style of guitar playing – it represented a labor of some twenty years in its own right. It was a

sacrifice I was not prepared to make, and so, not without some sense of loss and guilt, one fine day I tuned my guitar back to the old way, where it has remained ever since except for a few occasions when I have wanted to re-experience that very special Guitar Craft sound.

Fripp's influence over the way I make music, think about it, practice it, and teach it, however, extended far beyond my fleeting commitment to the new tuning. Several technical or music-theoretical ideas I latched onto at Claymont provided a seemingly limitless source of inspiration and sense of challenge for about two or three years, after which they assumed their place in the totality of my musical-conceptual repertoire. For many months, for instance, I was productively obsessed with octatonic scales and their harmonic implications, so different from conventional tonality – and practiced them incessantly on keyboard in numerous shifting polymetrical contexts, giving rise to magnificent quasi-improvisational structures along trains – so to speak – of thought directly derived from the Guitar Craft exercises.

Of the deeper, extra-musical, super-musical, meta-musical layers of labor, meaning, and suffering I found in Guitar Craft – what is there to say but that there is enough material there to study for a lifetime, whether within the way of Guitar Craft itself, or, as seems to be my lot, through other methods and channels. It has taken me longer to write this chapter than the week I spent at Claymont itself, and I have left out many details, some intentionally, others through laziness and lapses of memory. Doubtless as many chapters on Guitar Craft could be written as there have been Crafty Guitarists. For me, Guitar Craft was one of the single most vital links in my own continuous musical education.

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Chapter Eleven: Guitar Craft in the World

The worse the conditions of life the more productive the work, always provided you remember the work.

– Gurdjieff

Guitar Craft Literature

I hope that the previous chapter has conveyed the sense that Guitar Craft is not a belief system, but an experience – not a doctrine but a practice, not an abstract philosophy but a certain situation or set of conditions. In spite of this, Guitar Craft has spawned a number of publications in which Fripp has set forth some of the experience's fundamental principles. In addition to the handsomely produced "Guitar Craft Monograph" series, printed in dignified dark brown ink on durable matte-finish paper, there is the column Fripp has been running in *Guitar Player* magazine since 1989. (The monographs are available by mail through Guitar Craft Services, Rt. 1, Box 278-M, Charles Town, WV 25414.)

The GC pamphlets and monographs bear no indication of authorship, and the ideas certainly grew out of an evolving context in which many students and teachers were involved. Nevertheless the writing style in many passages is distinctively Fripp's. While it seems quite impossible to condense Fripp's already dense language – particularly as one often has the sense that his form of expression is equally as important as the ideas themselves – I offer here a brief selective survey of the Guitar Craft literature.

The two-and-a-half-page "Introduction to Guitar Craft: GC Phamphlet I" covers much of the basic material presented at the beginning of the previous chapter, and goes on to outline seven Levels of involvement in Guitar Craft. As one Crafty put it to me, in general higher Levels represent higher degrees of commitment to the work, and have in principle little to do with sheer instrumental technique: the Level Seven Crafty is not necessarily the best guitar player, but is the most committed. The seminars themselves are arranged by Levels, and acceptance to higher-level seminars is directly contingent upon Fripp's approval.

The seminar I attended, Guitar Craft (USA) XII, was a Level One, and to such seminars almost anyone can be admitted, provided space is available. In terms of work with the guitar, Level One emphasizes basic playing techniques – relaxation, posture, left and right-hand methods. At Level Two serious work in learning the GC repertoire begins – a repertoire whose foundation is the "Guitar Craft Themes." Students work in groups and often contribute new pieces to the growing repertoire. Level Two seminars sometimes focus on special themes such as music theory.

Level Three courses are generally longer – a month or more – and it is here that "Kitchen Craft" and "House Craft" may be introduced. In the "GC Phamplet I," in connection with Level Three it is asked, "Can we apply the quality of our relationship with the guitar to the mundane activities of our life, like cleaning the bathroom and preparing food?" Fripp's efforts to instill in his students proper homemaking practices may appear comical at first glance, until one considers that this is indeed a whole approach to living, an approach in which the sublime merges imperceptibly with the mundane, in which art and everyday life, play and work, are not rigidly separated. Gurdjieff once put it like this: "There is a thousand times more value even in polishing the floor as it should be done than in writing twenty-five books." *(Views, 105)*

At Level Three the going can get rough. Fripp sends out periodic epistles to Crafties on the Guitar Craft mailing list, and in his letter of December 16, 1987, he wrote, "What do we do

when we can't do anything, have no interest in music, never want to see a guitar again, have no energy for anything at all? Well, we do nothing, but while we are not doing anything we practice for eight hours a day. At this point something becomes possible, and Level Three deals with getting to this uncomfortable point."

Level Four involves a year's commitment to the musical life. At Level Five "the student becomes apprenticed to Guitar Craft, and a commitment is taken to live one's life according to the spirit of this particular way of craft." Levels Six and Seven are only vaguely defined in the "GC Phamplet I," but appear to involve increased personal initiative and performance in the world. At Level Seven, "We speak with our own voice."

In late 1986 Fripp, with the intention of setting up a more or less permanent center for Guitar Craft in England, purchased Red Lion House in Cranborne, Dorset. Here guitarists could stay and practice for lengthy periods of time, paying a portion of the house's expenses and contributing to its maintenance. For some two and a half years, Red Lion House served as a sort of ashram for Crafty Guitarists, and Fripp had long-term plans for remodeling the facilities to make them ideally suited to Guitar Craft's purposes. Red Lion House was the center of gravity for residential Crafties, and between his many trips abroad, Fripp lived with his wife eight miles up the road.

In spite of the occasional ne'er-do-well Crafty who could not be motivated to pull his own weight in the operation of the house, Fripp was proud of the cordial and courteous relations his students established with the village community, which in turn was supportive and encouraging. It developed, however, that Red Lion House's next-door-neighbor was opposed to the establishment of a music school on the premises; and that in fact such use of the house was technically against local planning regulations. Rather than push for a special permit, Fripp decided that Red Lion house had served its purpose, and put it up for sale; the last team of Crafties left in July 1989 and the house passed into new ownership.

Fripp, increasingly busy with his work of presenting Guitar Craft to the public and offering short seminars all over the world, wrote in the September 29, 1988 *Guitar Craft Newsletter*, "If Crafties wish to work together in an extended sense, do something about it: it is not my responsibility to provide a home for Crafties." In short, in the wake of Red Lion House's demise, he urged his students to take the initiative for themselves.

If in practical terms Guitar Craft is constructed on seven Levels, in the abstract Fripp postulates four categories of musician: the apprentice, the craftsman, the master, and the genius. Part One of *The Act of Music* (*Guitar Craft Monograph One [A]*), published in early 1988, contains such pithy characterizations as:

The apprentice acquires skill.

The craftsman acquires sensitivity.

The master acquires vision.

The genius attains freedom.

The apprentice is noisy.

The craftsman shapes sound.

The master shapes silence.

The genius is silent.

Part One of *The Act of Music* outlines the interrelationships of the triad music-musician-audience; Part Two adds the music industry, and complications multiply. Personally, I get less out of Fripp's convoluted efforts to construct a consistent Systematics of Music than from the many thought-provoking asides that dot the argument. For instance: "The genius and the creative audience are the parents to new music. The new music may only be heard once, in the flying leap of the improviser; it may be iconic, where the record of the event is no mere record, but where the recording of the event is the event that it purports to be: Sergeant Pepper. The transmission by symbols of one great creative leap may enable the recreative musician and the creative audience to return in innocence to an earlier moment of the same conception: Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Bartok." *(GC Monograph One)*

The Art of Craft (Guitar Craft Monograph II), published in late 1988, addresses more practical issues than *The Act of Music*, beginning with a lengthy discussion of the nature of practicing music. The four categories of musician again make their appearance:

The apprentice practices the craft of craft.

The craftsman practices the art of craft.

The master practices the craft of art.

The genius is artless.

In connection with practice, Fripp discusses the different functions of attention, the inseparability of the practice of music from the rest of the musician's life, the requirements of a bona fide way of craft, and the benefits of efficient practice habits. The guitarist's left hand and right hand are examined in detail, and a list of seven primary and seven secondary exercises is offered. Fripp offers interesting insights into a number of topics relevant to any practicing musician: vocabulary, repertoire, speed, time, accuracy, facility, economy of effort, relaxation, tone, presence, persistence, stamina, endurance, commitment, attention, divided attention, and memory.

Finally, the role of the teacher is considered. "The first thing a teacher learns," writes Fripp, "is the impossibility of teaching." In a nutshell, Fripp's philosophy of teaching puts the emphasis on the objective existence of craft itself, which the teacher has learned through practice and suffering and which he or she hopes to convey to the student. A successful teacher-student relationship hinges on both teacher and student getting themselves (their egos) out of the way as much as possible, and willingly adopting archetypal roles:

The role of the teacher is one of acceptance. The aspiring apprentice embodies the quality of affirmation: I seek music, help me ... The teacher is mother to the craft, and its emergence in the world; the apprentice, perhaps strangely, is father. Each play a role so that a pattern may unfold, and this unfolding pattern is part of a creative act: teacher and student are parents to their craft. The child is a craftsmanship which gives body to the craft itself. The craftsman learns that this is a child which has chosen its parents.

Some of Fripp's observations concerning the teacher-student relationship seem to be autobiographical, reflecting his experience in Guitar Craft: "The apprentice, at first, sees the teacher as an Ideal Being, probably perfect." At some point, the student experiences disillusionment, casts the Ideal Being down from the pedestal, and finds in its place "the Imperfect Being, a hypocrite mouthing profound notions, making bold claims and failing in their life, thought and feelings to match any of them. The teacher is released from the humiliation of perfection to the humiliation of imperfection. The alert student, seeing the teacher as an

apprentice-teacher, sees an apprentice, the same as them, with the same struggle, and then a deeper relationship is possible."

The third monograph is the poster-sized sheet of *Aphorisms*, laid out neatly in alphabetical order and suitable for framing – or at least taping up on the refrigerator. If the musical repertoire of Guitar Craft is its Psalms and the first two monographs its Pentateuch, then the *Aphorisms* are its Proverbs. Some of the "Aphorisms" first appeared in other Fripp interviews or articles; others appeared new to me when the poster was first published in late 1988. The *Aphorisms* bear some surface similarity to Brian Eno's *I Ching*-like deck of oracle cards, the *Oblique Strategies*; but overall they are more declamatory, didactic, and ethical in tone than Eno's poetically elliptical tidbits. And in some ways they recall the down-to-earth, commonsense humor of the likes of Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* – "Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise."

Some of Fripp's words of wisdom have in fact a financial slant: "You'll never get rich by hard work; but, you'll never get rich without it"; "The musician is as rich as the music they give away"; "Greed is a poor composer"; "Intentional poverty is fine. Unintentional poverty is wretched." Some have to do with spiritual etiquette: "Act with courtesy / Otherwise, be polite / But always be kind"; "Suffer cheerfully"; "Suffering of quality is never apparent to others"; "A mistake is always forgivable, rarely excusable and never acceptable."

Several aphorisms have to do with art and creativity: "Artistry acts with the assumption of innocence within the field of experience"; "Creative work is serious play." Many of the sayings are quirky and paradoxical: "How we hold our pick is how we organize our life"; "If we don't know where we're going, we'll probably get there"; "If where we are going is how we get there, we are already where we are going."

This brief selection of the total 137 *Aphorisms* gives some indication of their overall tenor: advice, consolation, exhortation, and crafty folk wisdom for the practicing musician in his or her day-to-day labors.

I'm not sure how much sense the Guitar Craft literature would have made to me had I not attended a seminar first. Without the context of my experience described in the preceding chapter, I might have been more inclined to write off the prose monographs as pedantic, impenetrable, and dense, and the *Aphorisms* as alternately quaint and cliche, profound and smug. As it is, I tend to see the literature as one small part of the total Guitar Craft situation Fripp has painstakingly constructed for the education of his students. Reader responses in *Guitar Player*'s "Letters to the Editor" section to Fripp's recent column – which he has used largely as a platform for the dispensing of Guitar Craft lore – have ranged from enthusiastic and enchanted to exasperated and uncomprehending; I suppose this may sum up reactions to his work – literary, musical, pedagogical, music-industrial, as a whole.

Crafties Speak

In an effort to understand what Guitar Craft has meant to different individuals, I have informally interviewed numerous Crafties by phone, most of whom I initially met at GC XII in 1986. A couple of Fripp's students, upon my telling them I was writing this book without Fripp's approval, refused to talk to me at all, apparently abiding by their perception of their teacher's wish not to give Guitar Craft any unauthorized exposure or publicity. On the other hand, several Crafties seemed distinctly relieved upon learning that my project would not bear the official Guitar Craft imprimatur: they were happy to let down their guard, open up, and speak of issues

that concerned them. Most interviewees were open and forthcoming about their experience, and talked freely about what they feel are Guitar Craft's benefits and shortcomings. Almost all say that attending one or more seminars has had a major influence on their music.

One Crafty who attended GC XII and a Level Two seminar later in 1986 spoke of "learning to see yourself the way others see you ... learning to accept yourself, especially those parts you'd rather not look at." At one point, he felt that the Guitar Craft style had gotten "a little too much in my eardrums," and felt a need to step back, to distance himself from the scene. But he left open the question of whether he would go back to a seminar in the future. Primarily a bass player, this Crafty's own musical path has taken him in the direction of electronic music and MIDI.

Woody Hamilton of the Columbus, Ohio, area probably represents a fair number of Crafties who continue to work with GC principles while holding back from a long-term commitment to the organization and its life-style. Hamilton, whom I met at GC XII, and who has been back for subsequent Level Twos at Claymont, calls Guitar Craft "extraordinarily valuable, mind-boggling – a profound experience – what it's like to approach something full-blast." Hamilton had played guitar for eighteen years prior to his first seminar in 1986, and, like me, tasted what it was like to start over again from scratch. He is part of a loose collection of Crafties in the Columbus area who meet every couple of weeks to play together, compose, improvise, and practice the repertoire. Hamilton says Guitar Craft has made him a "crusader for technique" with his own guitar students, and that he now has a better feeling for starting students properly from the beginning: how to hold the pick, how to hold the guitar, how to sit and relax, and so on. He doesn't declare himself a teacher of Guitar Craft, but rather teaches with the old standard tuning, in traditional forms, blues, rock and roll. He plans to return to seminars at least once every year and a half.

Steve Patterson, the (now) forty-five-year-old psychologist who was the oldest participant of GC XII, returned to Claymont for several seminars and was an active member of the New York GC performance ensemble, Chapter Two, which put on concerts on their own (that is, without Fripp). Like a growing number of Crafties, he has taken up the Chapman stick, an instrument which seems ideally suited for the Guitar Craft style. Although he has remained in touch with many Crafties, Patterson does not practice the official repertoire or use the new tuning. He describes his contact with Guitar Craft as very positive and educational, saying that the sense of a spiritual, emotional connection has been most important for him, the sense of a community sharing a common aim. In spite of this, he has decided against a long-term pledge to Guitar Craft that would significantly alter his priorities in terms of his life's other obligations. It is somehow reassuring to hear Patterson, a trained psychologist, speak of the enormously beneficial influence Guitar Craft has had over so many people's lives, and of the fact that there have been few if any real casualties.

Not that everyone's reports on Guitar Craft are uniformly glowing. Over its five-year existence, Guitar Craft has evolved away from its innocent beginnings fraught with the joy of discovery, and some Crafties tell this evolutionary tale with a sense of regret, even some bitterness. Guitar Craft XII, as described in the previous chapter, was near the beginning, when a certain intimate atmosphere prevailed that, by some accounts, has since been lost. The focussed repertoire practice tends to lack the dynamism, intensity, and group discovery that characterized Guitar Craft in its early stages. When a hundred and twenty guitarists show up for a Claymont seminar (as was the case in a Level Two weekend course in October 1989), Fripp is unable to devote the kind of personal attention to each musician that I and others found so special and

valuable. Fripp – and any person, after all, has only so much time and energy – seems to have become increasingly devoted to the training and needs of students at Levels Three and above.

In talking to Crafties, one issue that tends to come up is money. Guitar Craft seminars are expensive, and one guitarist I interviewed told ruefully of his reaction to the (voluntary) requirement of kitchen duty at Claymont: "I wasn't going to pay a hundred dollars a day to wash dishes." Another spoke with incredulity of his impression that the members of the League of Crafty Guitarists (see below) were not only not paid for their musical services, but had to pay Guitar Craft for the privilege to perform. (Tony Geballe, who has taken part in many LCG tours, had a somewhat different perspective on this issue. He pointed out that the tours take a lot of money to mount, and assured me that no one was sitting back behind the scenes getting rich. The U.S. tour beginning in July 1990 was a Level Six project for which the participants were not charged any fee. But they didn't make any money either. As Tony put it, essentially they "donate their time" to the tour out of a belief that the music is important and must be heard – plus, the experience of performing has its own rewards.)

One slightly disgruntled Crafty I interviewed said that "Guitar Craft has become a monster to a certain extent." He complained that Fripp is no longer present at all the seminars. "A hierarchy has developed," he said, with the upper-level students Fripp uses as assistant teachers "putting on airs" and lording it over the beginners. The ten or so highly committed Crafties who "go to almost all the seminars" are fabulous guitarists, but tend to lack Fripp's unusually developed teaching skills and powers of communication. Another Crafty criticized what he perceived as a growing "elitism" among Guitar Craft's inner circle: "I sort of gagged on it – Fripp's assistants looking at you with Fripp stares." He called the hierarchical organization "a destructive element, Guitar Craft's shadow side that's not really recognized." Nevertheless, both of these somewhat disillusioned Crafties plan to attend more seminars themselves – mostly, they say, for the individual instruction they are still able to receive from Robert, which they value highly.

Tony Geballe, whose wide-ranging interests include Turkish music, went to the third Guitar Craft Seminar, in 1985. Fripp subsequently called him up and invited him to return as an assistant teacher. Tony spoke with me candidly about his long experience with Guitar Craft, for several years he was an almost constant fixture at GC seminars; he stayed at Red Lion House on and off and performed on most of the tours. A couple of his pieces are featured on *Get Crafty*. He has supported himself by teaching, performance, and recording, and recently recorded an album with Toyah Wilcox and Trey Gunn, which was due to be released around September 1990.

Tony indicated that one aspect of Guitar Craft he finds attractive is that it is always changing: it is not a fixed set of principles or rules but rather resembles a growing organism adapting itself to changing circumstances. He remembered me from Guitar Craft XII and affirmed that nowadays Guitar Craft is very different, but was hard pressed to define exactly how. I asked him about the Levels, how does one go from one Level to another – is this something Fripp decides, is one sort of promoted at a certain point? Tony said that one's Level is determined by where one's center of gravity is, by one's commitment, by the kind of work one is undertaking. Furthermore, Level is something that is objectively apparent to those who know what to look for: it is something that can be recognized in a person. He said that all Levels can and do work together; on the current Level Six performance project are Crafties of different Levels, for instance Four, Six, and Nine. Nine? I thought there were only seven Levels. Well, Tony said, it recently became apparent that one of the Crafties was a Level Nine. Exactly how did it become apparent, I queried? "Well, if you can see it it's there. There's nothing mystical about

it, but it's quite impossible to explain, like a quantum physicist trying to talk to a layman about his work. It's in their presence."

I asked Tony for his take on the Gurdjieff-Bennett-Fripp connection. He said that Guitar Craft was quite different from the Gurdjieff work. Isn't there, though, perhaps a certain family resemblance, I asked? Tony said, "Well, one of my teachers was Ralph Towner, and so I'm sure there's some sort of influence there that comes out in my own music. Fripp studied with Bennett, so sure, there's an influence." This made a lot of sense to me.

The League of Crafty Guitarists

Live Guitar Craft music has been heard by audiences under a variety of circumstances. Even Level One students have been thrust into public to display their craft, as at the Iron Rail gig described in the previous chapter. On other occasions Fripp has had students at particular seminars mount more formal concerts and make radio station appearances. In early 1987 Fripp took a six-week Level Three/Four group on a performance tour in Holland and Israel. Various local groups of Crafties, with names like the New York Chapter and the Potomac Working Group, have organized themselves and given performances without Fripp, sometimes with his blessing and sometimes without. Fripp has talked about Guitar Craft in terms of an image of "one guitarist in many bodies": at least in theory, wherever two or more Crafties are gathered in the name of that metaphysical guitarist, there is professional-quality music.

But the League of Crafty Guitarists proper is Guitar Craft's primary performance vehicle, and over the past few years Fripp and various incarnations of the LCG have toured extensively, particularly in the United States. As the League is envisioned as a visible presence of Guitar Craft in the world, Fripp is concerned to put his best foot forward, and only the most committed Crafties are admitted to this exclusive group. Guitar playing is only part of it; among other things, to become a performing member of the League of Crafty Guitarists you must be able to look Fripp in the eye and say you have not taken any kind of drugs during the past year.

In the Guitar Craft Newsletter of May 3, 1988, Fripp announced, "There will be a Special Project in California during the second half of January 1989. This will require a high level of performance skill. Should any Crafty be considering this, begin your preparation now." In time, a team coalesced, and, billed as Robert Fripp and the League of Crafty Guitarists, presented concerts in five cities from San Diego to San Francisco in the week of January 14-21.

The venue for the two sold-out appearances in San Francisco on January 15 was the Great American Music Hall – maximum occupancy 470 persons. A handwritten notice on the door read: "*NO* cameras or recording devices permitted at this performance. Persons found in possession of cameras or recorders – *in use or not!* – will be asked (then told) to leave. No refunds will be issued. Ya wanna tape – go to a Grateful Dead concert."

No longer an active Crafty (not that I ever really had been, save for my week at Claymont), I came as a member of the audience for the early show. I squeezed into a chair at a front-row table and contemplated the Music Hall's strange baroque architecture and the audience – mostly white males in their twenties and thirties, a few young women, lots of beards and intelligent-looking faces.

Fripp and company made a grand entrance, walking in single file from the door at the left of the stage to the back of the hall, then up the central aisle to the stage. Standing in neat semi-circular formation, the League suddenly *looked* at the audience, with exaggerated expressions of

curiosity – as the audience looked back and giggled. This seemed to be a gesture in the direction of breaking down the barrier between audience and performers, or even reversing their roles entirely. Someone from the balcony yelled out, “Starless!” and Fripp threw a mock-peevish glance up in the offender’s direction.

The music was mostly memorized, with portions of some pieces possibly improvised. The fifteen Level Six guitarists sat on their chairs with perfect poise and concentration, almost expressionless, occasionally looking around the hall with an air of slightly self-conscious bemusement. The League performed on amplified acoustic Ovations with built-in pickups.

What the League of Crafty Guitarists lacks in visible passion it makes up for in an awesomely understated display of discipline and technique. At the San Francisco concert the overall musical impression was one of a smoothly-functioning V-8 cruising along comfortably at ninety miles an hour, sometimes downshifting into low gear with a tremendous release of energy.

The music – a carefully planned sequence of full ensemble playing, duets, trios, quartets, and larger combinations – whether fast or slow, intricate or thrashing, was almost uniformly *difficult*, impressive, and peerlessly executed. The audience, almost throughout, seemed quiet, attentive, blown away, responding to almost every piece with thunderous applause. I racked my brain trying to figure out when I had heard a concert of anything similar. There is nothing like it – a virtuoso acoustic guitar orchestra playing all original material in styles that blend rock and minimalism, Bartok and blues, gamelan and extended tonalities. The only real negative criticism I could muster was to the effect that most of the pieces were on the *allegro* side, structurally static and non-developmental, somewhat at the expense of expressive shifts of dynamics and tempo. But even this seemed perhaps less a critique of who the League *were* than a concept of what *I* would fancy doing, compositionally, with such an extraordinary ensemble at my command.

After the first fifty-minute set, Fripp stood up and, in that smiling gentlemanly way of his, asked the audience if they had any questions about Guitar Craft “or what we do.” Someone said, “Well – what exactly *is* it that you do?” Laughter.

Fripp eyed the questioner with feigned exasperation and said, “Where have you “been” for the past fifty minutes?” Gesturing gracefully to his ensemble, he added, “*This* is what we do.”

Someone else asked how he would classify the music. “I wouldn’t,” he said, and, after a pause, “‘Contemporary music for guitar ensemble,’ but that doesn’t really tell you much.” In general, Fripp’s manner of fielding audience questions resembled the way he interacted with students from the head table at Claymont: confident, cheerful, ironic, and witty – rather like an impish fount of wisdom.

The second set was considerably shorter than the first, and after six pieces – the final one a big loud polymetrical chordal thrasher – the League rose from their chairs to a standing ovation, took their bows, and filed neatly back out the way they had come in, following a beaming Fripp, who nodded to acknowledge the acclaim.

The League of Crafty Guitarists: Recordings

Fripp has always considered most of his music difficult if not impossible to record properly, and the problem of conveying the sense behind the sound is particularly sticky when it comes to the Guitar Craft repertoire. The ideal way to hear Guitar Craft music is live and unamplified; live and amplified – as at the concert just described – is second best; and on the home stereo a distant third.

Live and unamplified, the sound of the guitar orchestra evokes a feeling of immense depth and spaciousness: a circle or semi-circle of five, ten, fifteen, or twenty guitars playing concerted polyphony can be a marvel of acoustics, presenting a thrilling experience of translucent three-dimensional musical space. Quite aside from the philosophical issue of live versus canned music, there is simply no way that this music will sound the same coming out of loudspeakers, no matter how immaculate the mixing, no matter how sophisticated the playback and/or amplification equipment, no matter how well-engineered the recording. Live and unamplified, the sound of a fifteen-piece guitar ensemble is emanating from fifteen distinct points in space, animated by subtle acoustic harmonics and reverberations reinforcing each other and canceling each other out in a fantastically complex way that speakers cannot physically duplicate. In live, unamplified situations, the Guitar Craft sound surrounds the listener or participant with a tangible yet chaotic, turbulent yet oceanic expanse.

I felt this directly at the GC XII seminar in February 1986 as we sat around the circle in the ballroom and played. When the first Guitar Craft album came out a few months later, I was inevitably disappointed at the sound, which seemed to be completely lacking in depth. But *Robert Fripp and the League of Crafty Guitarists – Live!* is an affecting, impressive record nonetheless – the more so given the facts surrounding its recording. The "challenge" of GC XII, the reader will recall, was to present an evening of original music at the Iron Rail. Two months previously, Fripp had given the two-week GC IX group of seventeen guitarists a set of challenges: preparing music for a live radio broadcast, a recording session in the Claymont mansion ballroom (with a mobile twenty-four track studio parked outside), and three concerts at George Washington University.

Of the eleven pieces on *Live!*, eight were recorded at the University concerts. One ("Crafty March") was a take from the sound check at the University. Another ("The Chords That Bind") was recorded in the mansion ballroom. "The New World" consists of solo Frippertronics recorded live, overlaid with a linear studio solo (the liner notes don't clarify exactly what this piece is doing on a Guitar Craft album). Eight of the pieces are by Fripp, two are by Fripp and the League, and one is by Andrew Essex, one of the Crafties.

Most of what I have already said about Guitar Craft music applies to *Live!*: it's relentlessly intellectual and rhythmically difficult, stimulating and challenging to the listener; its sources are Indonesian gamelan textures, Bartokian counterpoint, Stravinskian tonality and meter, and rock rhythms; it's predominantly polyphonic and linear, even the slow pieces; it's admirably executed for the most part. And it is almost literally unbelievable, a vivid testimony to the power of an idea (Guitar Craft) – that the intricate, precise, and altogether coherent and accomplished music on the album was whipped into shape in such a short space of time.

"Guitar Craft Themes I and II" (subtitled "Invocation" and "Aspiration") are the foundation of the entire repertoire: an introduction to the new tuning, the style of group playing, and the characteristic picking and fingering patterns in Fripp's method. Every Level One Crafty learns the "Themes"; they are the same pieces my seminar played in our final "concert" described in the previous chapter.

Live! was released with a "companion" album, *Toyah and Fripp, Featuring the League of Crafty Guitarists – The Lady or the Tiger?* The premise of the album consists of Toyah Wilcox reading, to the accompaniment of gentle modal music by Fripp alone (Side One) and by Fripp and the League of Crafty Guitarists (Side Two), a pair of allegorical stories by a certain Frank R. Stockton (1834-1902). Stockton, Fripp explains in the liner notes, was a wood engraver and writer who bought Claymont Court in 1899 and lived in the mansion until his death; the room on the second floor he made his study is the room Fripp uses for private guitar lessons at Guitar Craft seminars.

Stockton's stories, "The Lady or the Tiger?" and "The Discourager of Hesitancy," beguilingly recited by Wilcox, are metaphorical fairy tales set in a mythical kingdom, written in a studied, deliberately archaic, romantic style; little more can be said about them without depriving the reader of this book the opportunity to be drawn into their special paradoxical magic in as it were a virginal state. I shall thus refrain from further explication except to point out that unless you are exceptionally fond of fairy tales it is unlikely you will find yourself wanting to play through the album more than once or twice. The Guitar Craft music that accompanies "The Discourager of Hesitancy" was recorded in the mansion ballroom by GC IX, the same group that made *Live!* It is unclear whether the evocative music – a long piece titled "The Encourager of Precipitation" – was conceived with the intent of using it as the soundtrack to Wilcox's reading, or whether it was originally a long independent instrumental; it could easily stand on its own.

The third GC album, *Get Crafty I*, was recorded by Fripp and a twenty-six-member incarnation of the League of Crafty Guitarists in October, 1988, in Wessex. Some of the selections were taped at concerts, others during rehearsals. To the best of my knowledge, *Get Crafty* was never distributed to record stores, but exists solely as a cassette available by mail order through Guitar Craft Services. Which is too bad, because it is far and away the best of the three Guitar Craft recordings to date.

The album represents a quantitative if not quite a qualitative evolution within Guitar Craft in the three years that had elapsed since *Live!* The music on *Get Crafty* is much more difficult and complex, the playing of a uniformly polished and virtuosic character, as opposed to *Live!*'s occasional lapses. If *Live!* can be compared to the eight-year-old Mozart's valiant and inspired if somewhat raw and naive attempts at symphonic composition, then *Get Crafty* is Mozart in his early twenties, in total command of a sparkling idiom he has completely assimilated.

Get Crafty also represents a maturing Guitar Craft in the sense that the sixteen pieces were written by a total of ten Crafty composers: Fripp, Tony Geballe, Ralph Gorga, Curt Golden, Trey Gunn, Steve Ball, Burt Lams, P. Walker, Spazzo Ray, and Juanita. In other words, by late 1988 the ongoing creation of the Guitar Craft repertoire had become a collective enterprise; although Fripp composed five of the tunes (more than any other individual), his students at this point were eminently capable of tapping into the creative source and producing from their own imagination music in certain immediately apparent respects equal to Fripp's own efforts in the genre.

Now this brings up some interesting issues. On the one hand, I find it hard to write about *Get Crafty* without lapsing into breathless superlatives – awesome, incredible, intense, *sans pareil*, fantastic, incomparable, musicians' music. On the other hand, viewing the music dispassionately (which I am honestly unable to do), one might comment that in spite of having ten different composers, *Get Crafty* sounds rather as though it came out of a single mind, a single fount of style and inspiration. A cynic might say that Fripp had finally succeeded in finding a way of cloning himself, growing experimental cultures of his musico-genetic code and devilishly standing back to observe the resulting mutations. A musicologist might point out that the greatest composition teachers (Bach, Schoenberg, Nadia Boulanger, Olivier Messiaen) have historically been those who have guided their students to their personal voices rather than imposing their own style upon them. In a paradoxical formulation, Fripp himself has said that in the early stages of King Crimson IV individual egotism – the urge for self-expression at the expense of a higher-level musical organism – was not a problem ... because he himself was "emanating" to the other members of the band what the music should sound like. Hmm.

There are a couple of pieces that strike me as being more individuated. Ball's "The Breathing Field" uses graded dynamic swells and contrasting textural planes to good effect; Lams

and Walker's "Chiara" is a lovely, slow, almost achingly hesitant harmonic essay. Fripp's own compositions on *Get Crafty* stand well above those of his imitators – they have real shape, real contour, real inner motion and line as opposed to a mere illusion of motion produced by a lot of fast notes. The juxtaposed textures of "Intergalactic Boogie Express," the exploitation of open-string resonance on "The Moving Force," and many other touches, show that Fripp is still (or was still in 1988) Guitar Craft's master composer.

But for the most part, the approach to rhythm, texture, harmony, and melody is interchangeable from piece to piece, with slight variations on the overriding stylistic theme. Why aren't there more slow and medium-tempo Guitar Craft compositions? Why so little true harmonic variety? Why so many dazzling ostinati and so little melodic lyricism? Why so few structural crescendi and diminuendi? So few real contrasts of mood and texture within individual pieces?

Complicated stuff, this. Even though one can point to the relative lack of compositional differentiation in an artifact like *Get Crafty*, there is something uncanny precisely about the way all the music seems to be flowing from a single group mind – a mind seemingly so much greater than the sum of its individual parts. And I suppose there is nothing inherently wrong with an artistic movement wherein unity of stylistic language is stressed at the expense of self-expression. When I was a graduate student we used to have a little game where someone would play obscure compositions by Mozart and Haydn and see if the others could guess which composer it was – the point being that the idioms of the Viennese masters were so very similar.

Rather than accuse Fripp of cultivating clones in Petri dishes, I am disposed to remind the reader that the whole Western concept of the composer as an individual Artist with a capital A is a phenomenon that dates back only roughly to Beethoven (1770-1827), successor to Haydn and Mozart in the classical tradition. It is probably safe to say that before Beethoven's time, the composer, though he may have enjoyed a certain privileged status on account of being affiliated with specific prestigious institutions of church or aristocracy, was inclined to view himself – and was apt to be viewed by the society he moved in – more as a craftsman than as a prophet, more a skilled worker than a genius.

And thus we come full circle to the idea of Guitar *Craft* as such. Across the horizon rises a new, or renewed concept of art: not individualistic but wholistic, not personally confessional art set apart from life on a podium but communally experienced craft which blends into life itself; not designated musicians entertaining designated audiences, but rather craftsmanlike musicians participating with fellow human beings in the universal drama of time, tone, music, rhythm; not the "me generation" but spaceship Earth.

New communities that embody such insights in their everyday activities, productivity, nurturing spirit, craft, and art – maybe Guitar Craft, for all its very human weaknesses, is one such community.

Six hundred years.

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Chapter Twelve: Objective Art

Be persuaded that things of a laborious nature contribute more than pleasure to virtue.

– attributed to Pythagoras

Fripp's Musical Legacy

In a sense, Fripp's musical identity is as elusive as his personality. "Schizoid Man" indeed – for the titan of screaming distorted rock guitar was also the merry prankster of Giles, Giles and Fripp and "Ladies of the Road"; the avant-garde jazz enthusiast of "Groon," collaborator with Keith Tippett, did double duty as the ambient-music landscape architect of *Evening Star*, fellow artiste of Eno; the classical British progressive rocker of *Lizard* and *Islands* metamorphosed into the new wave savant, with *Exposure*, Blondie, and the League of Gentlemen; the initiated member of the white brotherhood of soul, closing ranks with Daryl Hall, David Bowie, and David Byrne, found himself feminist fellow-traveler with the Roches; the devoted Les Paul technophile of Frippertronics, the minimalist world music/gamelan conductor of the 1980s King Crimson, became the uncompromising champion of new acoustic guitar music with The League of Crafty Guitarists.

Our schizoid man has been continually inventive in his use of what traditional analysts call music's "elements" or "parameters": form, rhythm, harmony, timbre, and melody:

Form. Fripp has always shown a refreshingly empirical approach to problems of unity, diversity, and coherence in musical arguments – concocting novel, unusual forms out of respect for the demands of the unique musical situation, for the specific piece, rather than simply pouring melodic and harmonic content into pre-existing song-form molds, as happens so often in popular music and traditional jazz. Though sheer length is in itself certainly no indication of musical virtue, the successful articulation of large-scale forms can be one indication of compositional vision, and here Fripp has been from time to time sufficiently convincing – as in the raga-like melodic elaborations of "No Pussyfooting," the sonatoid clarity of "Starless," and the sustained album-length epic musical poetry of *Exposure*.

Rhythm. Fripp is among those rare rock musicians – Frank Zappa and Paul Simon also come to mind – who have relentlessly battered away at the tyranny of four: four beats to the measure, and four measures to the phrase, that is. Odd, complex, shifting, and overlapping meters churn and surge through most of his albums beginning with the first bars of "Schizoid Man."

Harmony. Fripp's relationship to harmony presents itself as a curious mixture of naivete and sophistication. On the one hand, many of his earlier pieces exhibit ordinary, stock chord progressions – banal if often ingeniously voiced. On the other hand, he has explored a variety of linear modal and whole-tone/tritonic tonal structures, and, particularly with King Crimson IV, the kind of block-shifting harmony described in Chapter 9. The fierce linear counterpoint may derive from Bartok; the block-shifting approach to harmony may come straight out of Stravinsky. I am not completely convinced that Fripp has ever come to terms with the gravitational power of functional tonality. That is, I'm not sure he really understands harmony in the sense that Bach or Beethoven understood it: as a force of paramount importance in the articulation of phrases, cadences, climaxes, and large forms. On some of the composed pieces on *Red*, and in some of his later music, tonality is not so much engaged with as sidestepped, structural articulation being achieved through other harmonic, textural, rhythmic, and orchestrational means.

Timbre. From the beginning, Fripp has shown a creative and unpredictable approach to orchestration and texture – witness the variety of sheer *sounds* in the albums all the way from *In the Court of the Crimson King* to *Get Crafty*. Along with this studied concern for timbral interest goes a formidable production control, allied with a concerted effort to make even studio-produced recordings sound as believably live as possible – enormous dynamic range, and, all things considered, an absolute minimum of electronic "tricks" (excessive reverb, compression, overdubbing, sound effects, artificially spread-out stereo mixes, and so on.). Unlike his friend Brian Eno, Fripp emphatically does not use the recording studio as a compositional tool: he uses it in an effort to capture the feeling amongst real musicians playing in real time.

Melody. Even if some of the elements of Fripp's guitar style were in place as early as *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp* – tasteful chordal punctuations, a capacity to play very fast, and a fascination with the noise potential of electric guitar – his playing has matured and deepened beautifully over the years. There is Fripp the power-chord thrasher (King Crimson III), Fripp the delicate acoustic guitarist (Guitar Craft), Fripp the gamelan pointillist (King Crimson IV), Fripp the colorist (with Andy Summers), Fripp the long-sustained-note modal melodist (Frippertronics), and Fripp the jagged linear contrapuntist (all periods).

From the outset, you knew Fripp had at his disposal an almost superhuman set of chops. The question with Fripp was never, could he dazzle and stun his audience with amazing displays of speed and virtuosity? Everyone took that for granted from the beginning. The question has always been, rather, how to coax *music* out of those killer licks, how to put all that athletic technique at the service of a higher inspiration, in a particular band or other music-making situation. Fripp has faced the same dilemma as John McLaughlin: now that I can play anything I want to, just exactly what do I want to play, and why? And I suppose it must be said that at times both musicians have succeeded in answering such questions to the satisfaction of themselves and their audiences, and at other times they have failed. In Fripp's case, the success stories include, for instance, the "Sailor's Tale" solo on *Islands* and the twenty-minute rhapsody of "The Heavenly Music Corporation" on *No Pussyfooting* – both pieces requiring, when you think about it, not so much in the way of technical virtuosity as sheer inspiration and the ability to listen.

One of the pass defenders on the Cincinnati Bengals, the team that was to play the San Francisco Forty-Niners in the 1989 Super Bowl, bragged to the sports media that he could run the fifty-yard dash significantly faster than the Niners' star receiver, Jerry Rice. Rice responded to the taunts by saying, "This ain't no track meet – this is football." In the game, Rice made a fool of the defender with his subtle maneuvers: speed was no match for artistry. San Francisco won the Super Bowl, and Rice the Most Valuable Player award.

In his mature years, the eighteenth-century composer Joseph Haydn, speaking ruefully of his youthful compositions, said, "I thought then that everything was all right if only the paper was chock-full of notes." *(Hughes,* Haydn, *1970)* The twentieth-century Viennese musical revolutionary Arnold Schoenberg was onto something similar: he said, "Rests always sound well!" *(Reich,* Schoenberg, *1971)*

Fripp is aware that when you can play anything, the challenge is to know what *not* to play. One, two, or three notes are often more expressive than ten, twenty, or thirty. This is one of the meanings that can be read into his aphorism, "Honor sufficiency." *(GC Aphorisms Monograph)* Fripp may have been thinking along these lines when he used an athletic metaphor in a 1989 interview: "It may be that the visual appeal of the Tai Chi master is not equal in appeal to the heavyweight [boxing] contest. But I would prefer to see a Tai Chi master do nothing, superbly. I can see the appeal of two large men attacking each other, but only just." *(Drozdowski 1989, 31)*

Fripp as Composer and Improviser

I said earlier that music, in a specific sense of the word, can be improvised, whereas composition, in a specific sense, cannot. For reasons I shall now attempt to explain, I have come to regard Fripp as more important for his qualities as a musician than for his talent as a composer. To begin with, Fripp himself has repeatedly complained that his best music has never been put on record – despite, I might add, over twenty years of ample opportunities to do so. What he means, I think, when he says his best music has never been recorded, is that the special quality arising from direct contact between musician and audience in a live performance is inevitably missing from a recorded account of the event. As we have seen, that special quality is for Fripp more important than the sound itself, and may be fully present even if what is happening musically – that is, compositionally – is "a real turkey."

For Fripp that special quality of human contact is the primary substance, is the "music"; the organization of the sounding materials – the "composition" – is a secondary vehicle. This position does not satisfy that part of me which subscribes to the idea that some musical compositions are inherently more interesting, true, valuable, rewarding, and profound than others. This part of me, for better or for worse, is bound to argue that there is more genuine harmonic interest – a deeper revelation of tonal relationships – in almost any short twelve-measure four-part chorale by Bach than in many an extended King Crimson piece; more timbral vitality and nuance in Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* than in many an electronic Fripp soundscape; more rhythmic drive at the service of convincing formal architecture in Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" than in any Fripp piece based on polymetrical procedures, no matter how complicated. And if earlier I called *Exposure* Fripp's *Sergeant Peppers*, I am bound to say that in the final analysis it doesn't quite measure up. Why? Because its control over all the elements of composition is not as complete. Thus one answer to the question of why King Crimson IV, as Fripp put it, never "found a way of putting [their best music] on record," is that the pieces, as compositions, were simply not good enough. *(DeCurtis 1984, 23)*

If it appears fatuous to compare Fripp's compositional efforts to the canon of Western musical masterpieces, I might respond, polemically, that he asked for it. The historian in me finds some of his remarks about the art music tradition smug, self-serving, ill-informed, and unnecessarily inflammatory – destined, if not quite intentionally, to turn many young musicians away from a careful study of the tradition – a study which, I happen to believe, many young musicians with rock and the contemporary popular music industry as their sole reference point sorely need.

I might respond, more neutrally, that what I am really after is a clarification of what Fripp is after, and that what he is after is ultimately not the production of compositions as such, but rather the cultivation of a certain set of relationships between music, musicians, and audience. Every now and then he cuts through the obfuscation of his own theorizing and hits the nail on the head: "Whether Orlando Gibbons excites you, Japanese Koto classics make you foam at the mouth, Hendrix bites your bippy or the Sex Pistols had you on your feet gobbing, whatever it is, you know you're alive for that moment." *(Dery 1985, 56)*

It could be argued that we simply do not *need* more towering compositional masterpieces so much as we need enlightened instruction as to the inner meaning of music as a human experience: how to be able to use music to come alive. And it is precisely such instruction which Fripp, in his difficult, idiosyncratic way, has over the years endeavored to provide.

Priest or Pythagoras

The connections between rock music and the religious impulse are so multifarious that whole books have been written on the subject – see, for instance, Davin Seay and Mary Neely's *Stairway to Heaven: The Spiritual Roots of Rock'n'Roll.* African tribal music, New World Christianity, voodoo, blues, gospel, Bible Belt country music, R&B, rock and roll: it's all a continuous circuit. In a chapter titled "Hear That Long Snake Moan" in his book *Shadow Dancing in the U.S.A.*, Michael Ventura dwells on the voodoo connection. Voodoo, a volatile blending of tribal rites and Christian symbolism, was, in Ventura's words, "a metaphysical achievement as great as ... the building of Chartres or the writing of the Bhagavad-Gita ... These people built their cathedrals and wrote their scripture within their bodies, by means of a system that could be passed from one generation to the next. That system was rhythm." *(Ventura, 115)* Ventura goes on to portray the rise of rock and roll as the revenge of a spirituality of the body that white mainstream religion had done everything in its power to suppress.

Little Richard, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Carlos Santana, John McLaughlin, Eric Clapton – the list of major popular performers influenced at one time or another by religious ideas goes on and on. Beyond such clear-cut cases, one could compare the contemporary musical landscape to an ideological geography of tribal affiliations – each tribe with its own slant on the truth, its own icons and heroes, whether it's the Grateful Dead tribe, the Barry Manilow tribe, the hardcore punk tribe, the New Age tribe, the academic/straight tribe, the jazz tribe, the dance club tribe, the inner city tribe, the Guitar Craft tribe, or any other tribe. Each of these tribes, with their rituals and mythologies, does what any effective religion does: they help give their members an identity, defining their place in the cosmos – against other tribes perhaps inevitably, but most decisively against the ever-present threat of existential meaninglessness, chaos, non-being.

Fripp strove with his demons through King Crimson, and had himself photographed more or less as a priest for the cover of *The League of Crafty Guitarists – Live!* He has linked Gurdjieff's idea of conscious labor and intentional suffering with the Christian Orthodox idea of spiritual pain. *(Milkowski 1985, 17)* He has called himself a monk of the musical world *(Dery 1985, 56)*, and has written of Indian classical music and European medieval music as attempts to "quieten the mind to render it more susceptible to divine influences." *(Fripp 1981B, 41)* And then there is the whole body of Guitar Craft teaching, and Fripp's central role in the school.

In Fripp's case, perhaps more cogent than comparisons to conventional religion would be to go back to a time when the world was, in some ways, very much younger than it is now. Around the sixth century before the birth of Jesus Christ, an historically unparalleled group of spiritual leaders walked the earth, probably unknown to each other, but working as if from a common source of collective energy to transform mankind's destiny: in Palestine, various prophets communicating the word of God to Israel; in Persia, Zoroaster, founder of the Persian religion; in India, Gautama, the Buddha; in China, Confucius and Lao-Tze; founder of Taoism. And at precisely this time in Greece, classical Western philosophy was being born. It is difficult to regard this uncanny series of upheavals in consciousness as related soley by accidental chronological coincidence.

Pythagoras (c. 582 – c. 507 B.C.) left no writings that have survived; yet scholars, using secondary sources beginning with Plato, have pieced together a tantalizing image of this seminal figure traditionally regarded as the father of philosophy.

Pythagoras is best known for two doctrines: the transmigration of souls (a concept with striking similarities to Eastern concepts of reincarnation), and the conviction that all things are numbers (a belief that seems to take on new significance in this age of quantum physics, the genetic code, and the digitization of all information, including music).

For Pythagoras there was no separation between religion and science, music and number. Applying mathematics to the study of musical intervals, he discovered that the Greek scale could be derived from proportions involving only the numbers 1 to 4. The most fundamental interval of music, the octave, was represented by the most fundamental of all number relationships, 1:2 (a vibrating string and half its length). The perfect fifth turned out to signify the ratio 2:3 (a vibrating string and two-thirds of its length); and archetypal relationship 3:4 translated musically into the perfect fourth. The fifth minus the fourth yielded the whole tone.

(Anyone with a guitar and tape measure can easily replicate Pythagoras' epochal experiments. The series continues: 4:5 is a major third, 5:6 and 6:7 are species of minor thirds, then come the seconds. It was not until the early eighteenth century that the French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau discovered that the Pythagorean interval ratios corresponded to the acoustical harmonics of vibrating objects.)

Fripp, as should be evident by this point, fully embraces the idea of connections between numbers and musical relationships, seeing in such connections a sort of objective mathematics revealing a key to the order of the divine cosmos. Pythagoras is reputed to be the first to call the world *kosmos*, a word which, according to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, for Pythagoras combined "in an untranslatable way the notion of orderly arrangement or structural perfection with that of beauty ... By studying this order, we reproduce it in our own souls, and philosophy becomes an assimilation to the divine, as far as that is possible within the limitations imposed by our mortal bodies." *(Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 7, p. 38)*

Fripp has mentioned Pythagoras from time to time in interviews. One such occasion was in his *Musician* account of the League of Gentlemen tour, when he wrote of the Rouens Cathedral that so impressed him: "Here I am again sitting in front of this symphony in architecture, but tone deaf ... In terms of Western culture the mathematics of music were explored by Pythagoras ... This cathedral expressed, in mathematical propositions, combinations of proportions and distances of a form of universal order." *(Fripp 1980E, 34)*

Fripp is but one of thousands of Western musicians who have gone back to Pythagoras for the source of their numerological speculations and historical validation of their intuitive insights. Pythagoras did more, however, than work out cosmic mathematics. Having migrated from his native Samos to Crotona, he founded a secret society with aims religious, political, and philosophical. The society's rites had much in common with the Orphic Mysteries – a cult founded, according to legend, by the celebrated musician Orpheus, devoted follower of Dionysus, god of fertility and wine. Pythagoras' society had an ascetic element, and his followers performed various purification rites. Believers were bound to strict rules of moral conduct and dietary practice – eating of meat was forbidden, respect for animals cultivated. The belief in the transmigration of souls led to an equal respect for both sexes rare in the ancient world. It appears that the dearth of writings by Pythagoras himself and his immediate disciples was due to a rule of secrecy: like Gurdjieff, and like Fripp, Pythagoras was wary of freezing a living teaching into mere writ.

Pythagoreanism, thus, was not primarily an abstract doctrine: it was a school of practice, a group of followers initiated into a certain way of life, a league of adherents to Pythagoras' ideas –

ideas said to have been born of visions bursting into the teachers' awareness, revelations of the whole cosmic system.

Although no stranger to phenomena transcending irrational experience (I once fancied I felt the ghost of Gurdjieff floating up near the ceiling in the corner of a room), I scarcely wish to proclaim Robert Fripp a reincarnation of Pythagoras. But in broad terms the parallels between Pythagoreanism and Guitar Craft seem clear enough: philosophy as a way of doing things, a way of life; the emphasis on music and number as purveyors of absolute, objectively existing truth; the suspicion of written (and other recorded) media; the importance of right practice in moral conduct; the esoteric and ascetic atmosphere; the creation of workable channels for the religious impulse, fusing original ideas with elements of tradition – whether the Orphic Mysteries and ancient Greek mythology or the Gurdjieff system and Asian and Indonesian approaches to musicianship.

Today the word "philosophy," at least in its academic setting, may carry certain connotations – abstruse ideas detached from life, linguistic research, sheer abstract thought, mere logic, an absence of compelling ethical insight in a world faced with abundant and momentous ethical dilemmas in medicine, international relations, genetic research, women's rights, global population, ecology, and other areas. Much twentieth-century academic composed music – with its emphasis on formal structure at the expense of sound and accessibility, its tendency to grapple with head rather than soul issues – presents a curious parallel to the way branches of modern philosophy have become increasingly solipsistic.

In ancient times, philosophy – and tradition grants Pythagoras first use of the term – meant precisely what its roots implied: love (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*).

I suggest, simply, that it makes sense to view Fripp as a philosopher in the original sense of the word.

Objective Art

A student in Gurdjieff's Moscow circle reported an interview that took place in 1914. Gurdjieff said, "Recently in Petersburg I spoke with a well-known composer. From this conversation I clearly saw how poor his knowledge in the domain of true music was, and how deep the abyss of his ignorance. Remember Orpheus, who taught knowledge by means of music, and you will understand what I call true or sacred music." *(Views, 35)*

That would be the same Orpheus, mythical musician of the ancient Greeks, to whose cult Pythagoras was indebted for inspiration. In the legends, Orpheus played the lyre with such beauty as to soothe wild beasts, make trees dance, and stop the flow of rivers. Orpheus also made a journey to Hades, Hell, the underworld, the land of the dead, in a doomed attempt to regain his wife Eurydice.

Gurdjieff apparently accepted elements of such myths as historical fact, not merely as colorful allegories. He would rail on against the feebleness of contemporary Western art and music, which he viewed as subjective exhibitionism. In Gurdjieff's view, there was no limit to the power of what he called objective music: "There can be such music as would freeze water. There can be such music as would kill a man instantaneously. The Biblical legend of the destruction of the walls of Jericho by music is precisely a legend of objective music. Plain music, no matter of what kind, will not destroy walls, but objective music indeed can do so. In the legend of Orpheus there are hints of objective music, for Orpheus used to impart knowledge by music. Snake charmers' music in the East is an approach to objective music, of course very

primitive ... The same music, only a little more complicated, and men would obey it." *(Ouspensky, 297)*

Elements of this doctrine of objective music can be found, in somewhat watered-down form, in classical Greek philosophy and music theory, where the various modes and tunings were strongly identified with specific ethical or moral characteristics such as strength, passion, or lasciviousness.

According to Gurdjieff, the stuff of Western symphonies, paintings, and novels was subjective psychic debris: "the artist's perception of this or that sensation; the forms in which he tries to express his sensations and the perception of these forms by other people." *(Ouspensky, 26)* He took a dim view of such art, which he saw as achieving its effects on the basis of accidental associations in the minds of both artists and audiences. Fripp, as we have seen, has similar views on the topic: "Whenever a musician is interested in self-expression you know it's gonna suck ... Whenever self-expression's involved, the musician's concerned to play the music. When the music plays the musician, things really begin to happen." *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)*

Gurdjieff taught that a work of objective art would have an identical effect on each and every properly prepared individual in its presence: he taught that real art – such as the great Sphinx in Egypt, certain ancient statues of goddesses and gods, works of ancient architecture – operates with mathematical certainty, completely beyond the realm of accidental subjective associations. Once in the course of travels through central Asia, Gurdjieff and his fellow Seekers of Truth came across a strange stone figure in the desert near the Hindu Kush. Initially regarding it simply as an archeological curiosity, the travelers were slowly drawn into the objective geometry of the statue, deciphering its sense bit by bit, until they were convinced it "contained many things, a big, complete, and complex system of cosmology ... Gradually we understood the aim of the people who built this statue. We began to feel their thoughts, their feelings ... We grasped the meaning of what they wanted to convey to us across thousands of years, and not only the meaning, but all the feelings and the emotions connected with it as well. That indeed was art!" *(Ouspensky, 27)*

We moderns may be disposed to take such descriptions with a grain or two of salt. But if a grain or two of truth were to be found in Gurdjieff's doctrine of objective art, it seems to me that much in our systems of musical education would have to be turned upside down. I suppose I feel the same way about the Western music-educational edifice as Bennett felt about the Catholic Church: it is a vast custodial institution in possession of a mystery it does not understand. Many individual teachers may nurture the flame of understanding, but in an environment of pervasive darkness. The way harmony is taught, for instance, in standard college curricula using standard texts, is so at odds with the real meaning of the sacred harmonic/polyphonic geometry of Bach's chorales – the message is so consistently misunderstood, misinterpreted, or missed entirely – that I often fear for the survival of the tradition itself.

When Fripp laments that in classical music "the only person who is expressing himself is the composer," he is referring not to subjective self-expression, but to the idea of objective art, wherein music – Music – speaks through the musician, rather than vice-versa. *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)* The difficulties – both conceptual and practical – bound to arise in undertaking to train musicians in objective music are formidable. What is the vocabulary and grammar of objective music? On what historical models – philosophical, mythological, compositional – would such a music be based? What systems of discipline could be brought to bear on the education of musicians – disciplines of the heart, as well as of the head and hands? What is the true environment of objective music – concert hall, rock club, church, museum, commune, ashram, city street, hospital, homeless shelter, prison, desert, home – all of these or none of these?

Guitar Craft is one response to such questions. As early as 1980, Fripp wrote: “In the West, where we lack the tradition of objective art, those touched by the ‘otherness’ of music are groping intuitively to find and express this in terms of our own cultural traditions, such as jazz, rock and electronic music ... It is my conviction that music has the capacity to radically change far more of ourselves and ‘the world’ than we ordinarily believe.” *(Fripp 1980D, 33)*

The *Tetractys* of Pythagoras

- Representing the Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and Their Sum, 10 -

- "Source and Root of Everlasting Nature” -